

THE ROOTS AND DEVELOPMENT OF JOHN WESLEY'S ORGANIZATION

.....

A DISSERTATION

presented to

THE FACULTY OF DIVINITY, NEW COLLEGE

THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

.....

In Partial Fulfilment

of the Requirements for the Degree

of

Doctor of Philosophy

.....

by

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December 1951



supervisor, and to the faculty of the Post-Graduate School of Theology of Edinburgh University, to the Librarian and Assistant Librarian for their helpfulness during two periods of resident study. Grateful acknowledgement is made to the authorities at the Methodist Book Room and the Friend's House in London, the British Museum and the Bodleian Library where search was made for relevant documents. Grateful thanks is expressed also to the Librarian of the Gladstone Memorial Residence Library, Hawarden, North Wales for the use of the library during a brief period of residence and finally, to the Librarian of the Joint Library of Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, where the thesis was completed.

Primary sources have been used and given in the footnotes in all cases where possible. It has not been considered necessary to document the more familiar Wesley references. The name "Wesley" has been used throughout for John Wesley. The footnote reference The Large Minutes refers to the Minutes in the Works, 1872 edition, pp. 299-338. There is need for a simple standard to be devised for reference to the various editions of the Minutes.

The following abbreviations have been used:

JWW: Works of the Rev. John Wesley, 14 vols., 1872.

JWJ: Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, standard ed., 8 vols.

JWL: Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, standard ed., 8 vols.

WHS: Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society.

LQR: The London Quarterly and Holborn Review.

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INTRODUCTION

There are three points which need to be set down by way of introduction to this thesis. The first is that the determining event of English history was the making available to Englishmen of the Bible in the English tongue. The second is that John Wesley was the predominant genius in the creation of Early Methodism. The third is that organization is necessarily a result and its roots are of two kinds.

The first point to be stated is that the writer has come to a simple conclusion, perhaps too simple, with regard to English history, namely that the great determining event of English history was the making available to Englishmen of the Bible in the English language. It was the impact on English minds of the ideas of the Bible which produced the spiritual convictions about life which are the source and spring of the best life of England. The Civil War and the disturbed life of the Commonwealth were a direct result of the interjection of the ideas of the Bible into the thinking of Englishmen at the moment when the Mediaeval concept of life was loosing its hold and a new pattern was taking shape. From this period flowed most of the ideas which have fructified in the most treasured inheritances of English life. The institutions which sustain religion, the free life of the citizen and the welfare of the nation took their rise

mainly at this time and in many instances can be traced to Scriptural ideas finding expression through new religious groups.

Quakerism was the most dynamic of these movements. It represented the reaction of the quickened conscience against externalism and authoritarianism in religion. It is significant that the Church of England today would claim as part of the nation's finest inheritance many of the ideas which it endeavoured so bitterly to suppress.

The spiritual power which produced Methodism belonged to this same stream and was not a new eruption of the Spirit in the eighteenth century to be treated against an eighteenth century background only. Early Methodism was the climax in English history of the religion of the Inner Life. Wesley's doctrine of the church as both inward and outward was the correction on a New Testament pattern of the two concepts which had been so mistakenly in conflict. Here is where the real relationship of Quakerism and Early Methodism rests rather than in any elements of external organization. The relationship was spiritual and was spiritually communicated rather than the attempt to reproduce externals. This continuity of the religion of the Inner Spirit from the first reading of the English Bible onward is the true historical background of Early Methodism. Emphasis here has centered upon the relation to Quakerism. Another study is needed to

trace the same kind of roots which may have derived through the more spiritual wing of Puritanism. In his later life Wesley began to realize that there was a connection and to feel a new appreciation for the spiritual faith of his Puritan ancestors.

The second point which needs to be set down is that Methodist historians have given the predominant place in the creation of Early Methodism to Wesley and in this they have been correct. Wesley cannot be dislodged from the position of the creator of Early Methodism. He was the founder, the spiritual father, the first "Methodist" and the organizer. His personality towers over Early Methodism and his religious genius makes all indebtedness small in comparison to his own contribution. Little mention is made of Charles Wesley in this thesis because no element of Early Methodist organization can be attributed to him. His contribution lay in other areas.

The publication of the Letters of John Wesley marks an epoch in every phase of Wesley study. They provide the necessary material for that knowledge of the Founder in relation to whom the whole economy of Early Methodism must be studied. The Journal which was published at intervals presented the day by day evolution and was in part a propaganda instrument to the Early Methodist people. The Letters on the other hand reveal the man behind the movement and the

spirit which created the organization. The convictions which were the source of Early Methodism are most readily discernible in the Letters.

Wesley kept his objective before him always. This was a New Testament community of spirit and righteousness which he firmly believed could be realized in a New Testament sense here in the world of human affairs. This was the great difference between Wesley's faith and thought and that of his age and herein was his major contribution to history. The people of his age believed that God must elect or man was without help. Wesley believed that God had already elected and provided the grace and the means. Man's part was to appropriate the grace and make use of the means. To seek an end without the necessary means was enthusiasm. Here is the very point of all that he did. He believed that God could be appropriated in the soul and that any man could go on to "Christian perfection" if he would appropriate the grace and use the means prescribed in the New Testament. This was his primary conviction. From this conviction resulted the economy of Early Methodism.

The third point is that organization is necessarily a result. Thought precedes action, ideas precede institutions. This is true of all movements, but especially true of religious movements. Organization is the outward expression of inward beliefs.

There are, in general, three stages discernible with those who initiate religious movements. There is an inward passion rooted in an experience of God, in the faith that God has revealed Himself. Next this idea expresses itself in beliefs which attempt to formulate the experience. This is theology. Finally the beliefs come to expression in institutions. This is organization. Consequently the first task for the study of organization is to understand the roots in experience and belief. Thus two kinds of roots must be kept constantly in mind: those which result from experience in the lives of the founders and those roots which are in the nature of a borrowing from other organizations. The two kinds of roots are frequently so interwoven that they cannot be separated.

Moses said, "When I come to the children of Israel.... they shall say to me, What is his name? What shall I say unto them?" The answer which came to him was "say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you." For Moses the experience of God was the initial root, the Ten Commandments were the formulation of belief and the institutions of Israel the outward expression in organization. A similar parallel was true for Wesley and Early Methodism.

Wesley was a maker of history. "I am a spirit come from God and returning to God" was his summing up of this sense of destiny. The ultimate root of John Wesley's

organization is to be found in his experience of God, more especially in his awakening in 1725, his heart-warming in 1738 and his surrender to be "more vile" in 1739. It was the knowledge of God as the "Living God" increasingly received at these moments which made him a maker of history.

It is commonly said that Wesley built on "experience." This is far from the truth. Wesley built on the knowledge of God as a "living" reality. Experience was a product. His concern was that all men might enjoy the same reality. A theology of experience for Wesley would have been just another "opinion." The knowledge of God as the "Living God" produced experience, experience expressed itself in beliefs and the beliefs took form in institutions; hence, the rise of the organization of Early Methodism.

Thus there are two kinds of roots to Early Methodist organization. The first kind is that stated above. The second kind is Wesley's indebtedness to other organizations. The matter of Wesley's indebtedness to other religious systems is not easy to deal with because while he recorded some indebtedness on the whole he paid little attention to such matters. Essentials were of "grace," non-essentials were "prudential helps" and it mattered little whence they came. He kept his eye constantly on Scripture and his main concern was to keep true to its pattern.

At the same time he had a strong sense of his

"extraordinary" mission and did not hesitate to express this by his adaptation of forms nor to make free use of the principle of trial and error. He was always aware that his converts had to walk a narrow way hemmed in by other movements so similar in character that they could not easily distinguish between them. To have recorded indebtedness would have been to put a stumbling block in their way.

In the middle years of his work he arrived at the conclusion that the Scripture, the only authority he then allowed, did not give an ordered system of ecclesiastical organization. It offered a Life. The call of God to all men was to appropriate this life. Ecclesiastical institutions had only one justification. They had a right to exist in so far as they enabled earnest seekers to press on in their search after and their realization of Scriptural holiness. Otherwise, there was no sufficient reason for their existence. Each element of Early Methodist organization was therefore, in Wesley's judgment, the best possible institution to provide for the fullest nurture of this New Testament life.

CHAPTER I

ENGLISH RELIGIOUS HISTORY IN THE SIXTEENTH, SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

The Rise of Methodism, under John Wesley (1703-1791), to be appreciated in its true setting, must be seen against the background of English history in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The vision which Wesley saw for the English church was a product of the cumulative forces which had been at work during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and which came to fruition in the Evangelical Revival in the eighteenth. It is a mistake to try to interpret the rise of Methodism as a product of its own century only and to neglect its unmistakable roots in the preceding English situation.

Wesley's vision for England was that scriptural Christianity, through a quickened church, would possess the land. He was thwarted in the direct realization of this but, through the rise of Methodism, he accomplished the partial transformation of his nation and released, into the world beyond both geographically and ideologically, powers which burst open new frontiers for the kingdom of God. The Church of England, in large part, resisted evangelical quickening but, in spite of this, English national life experienced a new birth. Conceptions of freedom and destiny long cherished

by seeking hearts found expression in Methodism as still another wave of the increasing impact of Scriptural truth upon the national spirit.

The organization of Methodism, which is the subject-matter of this thesis, was the end result of the ecclesiastical conceptions which had emerged in the two previous centuries. Wesley was the founder and organizer who gave to Methodism its particular mould but in doing this he was bringing together forms of church organization which had been in bitter conflict.

Methodism was a new creation in form and spirit and marked a new Christian era. Its polity, while borrowing earlier English religious forms, yet was, in reality, a product of the triumph of those spiritual forces which had waged a heroic warfare against the absolutist and reactionary powers of Established Church and secular nation. John Wesley's organization was, primarily, not a borrowing of ecclesiastical forms--rich as the two preceding centuries were in the emergence of these--but a structure which arose to provide a polity for a new evangelical and quickened spirit. In these centuries the volcanic eruption of freshly released Scriptural truth expressed itself through the Puritan movement, the rise of Quakerism and advanced to its crest in the creation of Methodism as a national and world force. Wesley and Methodism represent the crest of these tides of the

Spirit. Wesley's organization was an ecclesiastical mould, not merely planned by a man and his associates, but one which was the product of an inner life, an attitude of mind and the application of the Word and the Spirit to life. It was an organization which had arisen through the prolonged working of the Christian faith in the life of a great people. It symbolized the working of that power, latent in the Scriptures, to shape for itself a medium of expression, namely, a church. The rapid expansion of Methodism and the ready adaptation of its polity among the people of many nations provided some evidence that it expressed a true relation of form to spirit, of ecclesiastical structure to New Testament reality. Wesley never sought a new ecclesiastical polity but always was prepared to allow one to come into existence if circumstances compelled this. The rise and development of Methodism was the inevitable result of three centuries of the total unfolding of English religious history when a man of Wesley's genius was available to lead and organize such a movement. Thus Methodist organization was the product of two things: First, the earlier organizational structures which had emerged in England in the previous centuries, and second, the Divine power manifest in the inner life of the Spirit. Wesley's great contribution was that he brought these together, at a crucial moment in English history, and created a new religious movement, which carried the conception

of the Christian Gospel as the hope for mankind's need a long step forward.

Had the Church of England been possessed of the grace to allow a spiritual revival to work through her life and quicken the nation, making Church and nation together a Christian people it would have created a new pattern for the world. Since this did not happen, the next thing was that a new denomination should arise uniting the form and spirit of the English past and providing the world with the most flexible instrument yet created to sustain and extend the life of the Spirit. The form which came into being was the structure which clothed that spirit released through two centuries of the working of Scriptural truth.

Trends in English History from the English Reformation to the Evangelical Revival

"No greater moral change ever passed over a nation than passed over England during the years which parted the middle of the reign of Elizabeth from the meeting of the Long Parliament. England became the people of a book, and that book was the Bible. It was as yet the one English book which was familiar to every Englishman; it was read at churches and read at home, and everywhere its words, as they fell on ears which custom had not deadened, kindled a startling

enthusiasm,"¹ so writes J. R. Green.

Green continues, "When Bishop Bonner set up the first six Bibles in St. Paul's 'many well-disposed people used much to resort to the hearing thereof, especially when they could get any that had an audible voice to read to them....' One John Porter used sometimes to be occupied in that goodly exercise, to the edifying of himself as well as others. This Porter was a fresh young man and of a big stature; and great multitudes would resort thither to hear him, because he could read well and had an audible voice." But the "goodly exercise of readers such as Porter was soon superseded by the continued recitation of both Old Testament and New in the public services of the Church; while the small Geneva Bibles carried the Scripture into every home."²

Green then proceeds to show that the popularity and influence of the Bible was instrumental in moulding every major area of English life, in particular he mentions literature and "the character of the people at large." Again: "The whole moral effect....however dispassionately we examine it, was simply amazing." He continues, "One dominant influence told on human action: and all the activities that had been

1. J. R. Green, A Short History of the English People (American edition; New York: 1916), p. 460.

2. Ibid.

called into life by the age that was passing away were seized, concentrated, and steadied to a definite aim by the spirit of religion. The whole temper of the nation felt the change. A new conception of life and of man superseded the old. A new moral and religious impulse spread through every class."³

During the three centuries under consideration, three powerful currents flow intermingling and shaping the pattern of English life. The strongest of these was the power of religion. The other two were related to this. They were a new sense of national and, later, of world destiny. Within this was an urge to freedom and the shaping and reshaping of those institutions of church and state, of government and justice, which would secure and enlarge the liberty of the citizen.

Henry VIII (1509-1547) reigned at a transition period of English history. The Renaissance and the Continental Reformation were already sending strong currents through English life. Zarek says, "The whole trend of the time and its spiritual conflicts found truly dramatic expression under the three children of Henry VIII, who succeeded him in turn. Each of them reflected in person one of the main

3. Ibid., p. 462.

currents in England."⁴ They were Edward VI (1547-1553), Mary (1553-1558) and Elizabeth (1559-1603).

The Stuarts followed the Tudors, with James VI of Scotland, becoming James I (1603-1625) of England. The Stuarts were arrogant and completely unconscious of the powerful currents swelling around their throne. James's memory is perpetuated in the King James version of the Scriptures. Charles I (1625-1649), his son, died by the executioner's axe, condemned by "the Commons of England in Parliament assembled."⁵ The period of the Commonwealth intervened to be followed by the two Stuarts, Charles II (1660-1685) and James II (1685-1688).

John Buchan writes of the Commonwealth,

He (Cromwell) lived in an era of transition, when the world was moving away from the securities of the Middle Ages and labouring to find new sanctions for the conduct of life. The seventeenth century saw the end of the wars of religion and the beginning of the wars of economic nationalism, and Cromwell stood at the point of change. It was an era of dilapidation and disintegration; dilapidation which is the breakdown of shape and line; disintegration which means the dissolving of things into minute elements. Iconoclasts there have always been, and there were iconoclasts then who would have replaced one idol by another; but more dangerous were the analysts and the atomizers under whose hand belief crumbled altogether. In politics, in thought, in religion, in art there was

4. Otto Zarek, The Quakers (London: 1945), p. 16.

5. Resolution of the Lower House quoted by Green, op. cit., p. 571.

everywhere a dissolution of accepted things.⁶

Cromwell's problem was that of giving institutional expression to these ideas which, having overthrown the old, had brought the Commonwealth into being. Religion was the dominant issue but Cromwell was faced with the problem of applying that ideal of a kingdom, which men had found in Scripture, to the affairs of the everyday national life. Although he failed, as any man must have failed, and reaction set in; yet, none of these truths was lost. Englishmen, tired of transition and uncertainty, turned again to the traditional monarchy as the only authority they knew.

Green writes,

And, with them, (the New Model army), Puritanism laid down the sword. It ceased from the long attempt to build up a kingdom of God by force and violence, and fell back on its truer work of building up a kingdom of righteousness in the hearts and consciences of men.....In the Revolution of 1688 Puritanism did the work of civil liberty which it had failed to do in 1642. It wrought out through Wesley and the revival of the eighteenth century the work of religious reform which its earlier efforts had only thrown back for a hundred years.⁷

The Restoration and the coming of Charles II to the throne placed the forces of reaction and negation in power. The age of reason replaced the age of faith. Intolerance

6. John Buchan, Oliver Cromwell (London: 1934), pp. 4-5.

7. Green, op. cit., p. 604.

and persecution reigned. In 1768 Wesley described the character of Charles II, "Oh what a blessed governor was that good-natured man, so called, King Charles the Second! Bloody Queen Mary was a lamb, a mere dove, in comparison of him."⁸ The Wesleys and the Annesleys, the grandparents of Samuel and Susanna Wesley, were among those who suffered. Both grandparents refused to take the oath, were ejected from their livings and continued as Dissenters.

James II was an avowed Roman Catholic and alienated national sympathy to the point that William of Orange, a Protestant who had married James's daughter Mary, was invited to lead a revolution. James fled and, in 1688, William and Mary were proclaimed joint sovereigns of England.

The Toleration Act of 1689 granted toleration to Protestant Dissenters and, while imperfect, it marked the end of an era of ruthless intolerance and the beginning of the modern spirit of religious freedom. Henceforth religion was to be only one of several major issues influencing national affairs.

Wesley was born in 1703, in the reign of Anne (1702-1714), who succeeded William and Mary. Wesley's work is usually treated against the background of the eighteenth century, since he lived to 1791, but it cannot be asserted

8. JWJ, V, p. 248.

too strongly that the formative influences of his early life were those of the seventeenth century background. The Authorized Version of the Scriptures was given in 1611. John Smyth, founder of the Baptists, died in 1612. Oliver Cromwell lived till 1658, John Bunyan till 1688 and George Fox till 1691. Only twelve years separated the death of Fox and the birth of Wesley.

The Eighteenth Century--The Century of Methodism
Green says of Wesley,

But it was....John Wesley, who embodied in himself not this or that side of the new movement, but the movement itself....His life, indeed from 1703-1791, almost covers the century, and the Methodist body had passed through every phase of its history before he sank into the grave at the age of eighty-eight.⁹

The rise of the Methodist societies came at the end of the thirties, their organization in the forties and the development and expansion continued throughout Wesley's life and beyond.

An outline of the events of the century is necessary although it would be difficult to find a similar movement which owed less to the immediate historical setting. Wesley went his way in disregard of the course of events and the

9. Green, op. cit., p. 738.

lives of important personages. This does not mean that he was indifferent to events, for at times he addressed the King or Prime Minister or wrote a tract, but rather that he pressed on the work of the Societies regardless of events. Nevertheless, the exceptional development of Methodism would not have been possible had it not coincided with the spectacular rise of Great Britain as a world power.

The eighteenth century is marked by four leading developments. First, the British Empire was in process of early formation, marked by the growth of the American colonies, (which toward the end of the century were lost), the conquest of Canada from the French and the addition of the sub-continent of India with her teeming millions, as well as other less significant trophies of conquest.

During a large part of the century Britain was at war, and while reverses were suffered, she finally established her superiority over her old enemy France and clarified her position in relation to Continental Europe. Green speaking of the course of events in English history toward the close of the century says England had never stood higher among the nations of the Old World than after Waterloo; but she was already conscious that "her real greatness lay not in the Old World but in the New." From the moment of the Declaration of Independence it mattered little whether England counted for more or less with the nations around her. She was no

longer a mere European power, no longer a mere rival of Germany or Russia or France. He writes,

She was from that hour a mother of nations
Her work was to be colonization. Her
 settlers were to dispute Africa with the
 Kaffir and the Hottentot, to wrest New
 Zealand from the Maori, to sow on the shores
 of Australia the seeds of great nations.
 And to these nations she was to give not
 only her blood and her speech, but the
 freedom which she had won. It is the
 thought of this which flings its grandeur
 around the prettiest details of our story
 in the past.¹⁰

A sense of destiny was running high in the English people as the eighteenth century moved toward its climax.

The second development was in the internal economy of the nation. The transition from agriculture to industry and the consequent movement of population from rural to urban areas was in progress. In the second half of the century the industrial revolution was changing the course of history. English ships were beginning to carry the trade of the world and her ports were becoming the distributors of the world's commerce. England rapidly became a wealthy and powerful nation.

In her political institutions, the third major development was taking place, for the power of government was passing from monarch to parliament and although there were

10. Ibid., p. 787.

stages in this growth, yet it was the political events of the early eighteenth century which established the British throne as a limited monarchy and made parliament the governing body of the English people.

The fourth development, which was interwoven with all of these, was the revival of religion known as the Evangelical Revival. English moral and religious life moved at a low ebb at the opening of the century. Green says, "Never had religion seemed at a lower ebb."¹¹ Over against this, he affirms, "England remained at heart religious."¹² The Evangelical Revival, which Wesley personified, was not a religious quickening only but the real power of the spirit which demonstrated its ability to ennoble and inspire every phase of life, creating a revolution of values and bringing to Englishmen a new sense of destiny.

In addition to the above, other forces of a less obvious nature were working in the intellectual and cultural life. The transition from the traditional concept of authority to that of the exaltation of reason was completely changing men's approach to the whole field of knowledge.

The Copernican theory of the universe, propounded a century before, was now being grasped, in its real significance,

11. Ibid., p. 735.

12. Ibid., p. 736.

by men in their thought of the universe. Williston Walker writes as follows,

The real popular demonstration of the Copernican theory was, however, the work of Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727). His Principia of 1687 made a European sensation, showing as it did by mathematical demonstration that the motions of the heavenly bodies are explainable by gravitation. The effect of Newton's conclusions was profound. To thinking men, the physical universe no longer appeared a field of arbitrary divine action, but a realm of law, interpretable, such was the conclusion of the science of that age, in strict terms of mechanical cause and effect. The earth was no longer the centre of all things, but a mere speck in a vast realm of bodies, many of infinitely greater size, and all moving in obedience to unchangeable law.¹³

Deism, a philosophic rather than a religious conception, which declared Christianity to be based in nature and reason, was the message proclaimed from English pulpits. Thousands of pulpits were empty, as a result of earlier purges, while many others were manned by men of inferior training. The Evangelical Revival protested against the Deistic interpretation of the Christian religion and the consequent failure of morals. Wesley taught the "power of godliness" to support Christianity as a way of life.

Unitarianism also had made its inroads, especially among

13. Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church (Edinburgh: 1947), p. 483.

the Dissenting bodies, resulting in a loss of both fervour and numbers. Presbyterianism, a successor of earlier Puritanism, attributed its loss of strength and influence to this departure from orthodoxy.

One characteristic, which marked men of all persuasions, was an unwillingness to engage in any kind of discussion which could be interpreted as political. This was a consequence of the bitter controversies of the preceding century, when the issues of church and state were so intermingled, that purges, ejections and persecutions had resulted, in each period, from whatever party had control. All religious fervour was classed as "enthusiasm" and considered dangerous.

The Stuarts and the Roman Catholics continued to intrigue for the repossession of the throne. France was a treacherous enemy and it was common practice to brand as traitorous any who dared to depart from the accepted standards of church and society. These factors explain, in part at least, the reason for the opposition and, at times, persecution, which resisted the Wesleyan movement.

They also provide a background for the understanding of what took place in the rise of the religious societies. English men and women whose fathers had suffered deeply in religious controversy and who, in some cases, had been identified with earlier religious movements, were hungry for spiritual reality. In addition to this, uprooted masses

living under new and unhappy conditions, artisans and colliers steeped in poverty and ignorance, responded to the message of free, universal, pardoning love presented against the traditional background of a frigid Calvinism and the deadness of a legal ecclesiasticism. The time was ready for a spiritual revolution to parallel the revolutions in thought, in geography and in the conception of the material universe. The man was ready in the person of John Wesley.

History of the Rise and Development of Ecclesiastical Organization in England from the Reformation to Methodism

Church polity has been a major issue in the history of England and one which has been closely interwoven with the national destiny. Church and state were so interrelated that the form of church government was considered to be significant for the security of the throne and at times was the determining factor in national and international relations. For Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth, James I, Charles I, Cromwell and the Commonwealth Parliament, Charles II, James II, William and Mary and Anne the form of the government of the church was an issue of the first magnitude.

For the citizen this was equally true from a different standpoint. Principal Watt, speaking of Alexander Henderson in Scotland, says,

The parishioners suddenly found themselves confronted with a new minister--one whose whole heart and soul was in his work. The instrument of the change was a sermon by Master Robert Bruce, the most searching preacher of the day. In his dark corner in the Church of Forgan Henderson's soul was stirred to new resolves. He reckoned it the hour of his conversion, and the new religious outlook meant a new ecclesiastical one as well.¹⁴ (Underlining my own)

Alexander Henderson's "new religious outlook" convinced him of a new "ecclesiastical" position. This was a characteristic of the centuries between the English Reformation and Methodism. As men felt the impact of the Continental Reformation and read the Scriptures for themselves in their own tongue, many experienced a new quickening of faith. For some this meant a new conception of the structure of the church, for which some were prepared to die, others to go into exile and still others to foster a revolution in both nation and church.

Six types of ecclesiastical organization appear in the England of this period. They are Papalism, English Episcopacy, Presbyterians, Congregationalism, Quakerism and Methodism. Henry VIII rejected papalism, that is, hierarchical episcopacy with the Pope at its head, and established the episcopacy of the Church of England with himself as "the

14. Hugh Watt, Representative Churchmen of Twenty Centuries (London: 1927), p. 218.

supreme head of the Church of England."¹⁵ The Six Articles Act¹⁶ (1539) showed that Henry had no desire for a Protestant Reformation. The changes which he brought about had little effect upon the church either in its doctrine or its polity, apart from the headship. Edward VI, Henry's son and successor, was only nine years of age and ruled through a council, of which the duke of Somerset was the presiding officer with the title of Protector. Both Edward and Somerset were men of Protestant sympathies, desiring to proceed further along the lines of the Continental Reformation. An Act of Uniformity¹⁷ was passed with the intention of giving order to the religious life of the nation and requiring the universal use of the First Prayer Book of Edward VI. The doctrine of the Church of England was set out in Forty-two Articles, which were largely the work of Cranmer, archbishop of Canterbury. No change took place in the episcopal organization of the church.

Mary succeeded Edward and, as she was an over-zealous Roman Catholic, she proceeded to restore the nation to its former papal allegiance and the church to its papal structure. Protestant reformers were forced into exile. Elizabeth,

15. Henry Gee and William John Hardy, Documents Illustrative of English Church History (London: 1896), p. 270.

16. Ibid., pp. 303-319.

17. Ibid., pp. 358-366.

Mary's successor, began cautiously to return the church to the type of English Episcopacy which had developed under Edward. The Act of Supremacy¹⁸ (1559) made Elizabeth the "supreme governor" of the church rather than the "supreme head," the title which Henry, her father, had assumed. An Act of Uniformity¹⁹ was passed, the Second Prayer Book of Edward VI revised, and the Articles of Religion, now fixed at thirty-nine, were imposed. This organization of the Church of England, commonly known as the Elizabethan Settlement, has continued with only minor changes to this day.

The Elizabethan Settlement was a type of episcopacy which is usually known as English episcopacy. The Church of England was, by law, established as the state church and episcopacy continued to be the prevailing type of church organization in England throughout the three centuries under consideration. Wesley was a priest of the Church of England and, since it was against the background of the English episcopacy that he developed an organization which took a different form, it is necessary to give a brief outline of the structure and mode of functioning of this ecclesiastical system.

The foundation of the English episcopacy is its claim to rest upon the truth of apostolical succession, that is,

18. Ibid., pp. 442-458.

19. Ibid., pp. 458-467.

the unbroken succession through episcopal ordination, from our Lord, through the apostles and bishops, who are New Testament "episcopoi," to the present church. Three orders are recognized, namely bishops, priests and deacons; but the perpetuation of the church is through the bishop by ordination and by rule. The diocese is the territory which comes under the rule of the bishop and in which he is the final authority. Dioceses may be small in area or extremely large, as for instance, in Wesley's day the diocese of London included also the oversight of religion in the American Colonies and it was to the bishop of London that Wesley appealed unsuccessfully for the ordination of priests for America. The laity, in theory, have no voice in the government of the church although, in practice, they hold a varying amount of influence.

Convocation is a kind of ecclesiastical parliament consisting of two houses and, more recently, a third composed of the laity. Convocation meets by royal license and is a deliberative body. It is not a governing court of the church.

There are Archbishops of Canterbury and York but their legislative power is limited. They do not exercise the authority of an archbishop of the Roman Church. The real power of government rests with the bishop. The Church of England has always claimed that within the episcopal structure

the broadest interpretations of both belief and practice are allowed. The history of these centuries prove, as Wesley experienced, that Christian liberty is restricted to the rule of the bishop of the diocese whose word is final within his own diocese. In matters of wider interpretation, episcopacy is limited by the fact that, while various deliberative bodies meet from time to time, there is no final authority higher than the bishop in his diocese. This is the main reason why Wesley and Methodism were neither received officially nor repudiated by the Church of England.

The Protestant sympathies of the reign of Edward VI took more definite form in the reign of Elizabeth. The Marian refugees returned thoroughly indoctrinated in a new system of church polity rooted in the Reformation interpretation of the Scriptures. These became known as Puritans. They wanted the Church of England purified according to their interpretation of Scriptural standards and demanded the abolition of the office of bishop, the organization of the Church of England on presbyterial lines, an educated ministry, changes in the Prayer Book to conform with Continental Reformation standards, and lesser changes in church order. The Puritans formed in Parliament a strong party, whose objective was the reformation of the church. Presbyterianism was challenging episcopacy.

"Presbyterianism," writes Dr. Moffat, "is the name for

belief in the apostolic and catholic Church as governed by presbyters. There may be higher offices in the church, occupied by individual presbyters for a time or even permanently, but there is no higher order of the Christian ministry than that of presbyters, who discharge the full functions of that ministry, administering the sacraments, preaching the Word, ordaining to the ministry, caring for the souls of their people, supervising the discipline, service and enterprise of the Church. Such is the characteristic note of Presbyterian polity...."²⁰ "What a modern student would call orders or constituted offices ranked less, in the apostolic Churches, than special gifts, e.g. of prophecy..... As we put aside the branches and look down into the pool of the primitive church, we see the apostles divinely commissioned for the Church at large, doing the work of evangelists, founding Churches by the authority of the Lord.... These ministers or presbyters are in the apostolic succession, as they exercise their full ministerial functions."²¹

Calvin (1509-1564), the leader of the Reformed Reformation in Geneva, became persuaded that the government of the church by presbyters was the true Scriptural order. As early as 1569 Dr. Thomas Cartwright (1535?-1603), who had

20. Moffat, The Presbyterian Churches, p. 1.

21. Ibid., pp. 8, 9.

become convinced that the New Testament Church was presbyterian in form, proposed that the Church of England be reconstituted on the primitive basis, for which he was deposed from his chair at Cambridge. Cartwright went to Geneva where he observed the Presbyterian polity in operation and returned to lead the Puritan attack against episcopacy. He entered upon "a literary duel with Whitgift (Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge, and afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury), over the question of ecclesiastical polity. The controversy cut to the bone. For the first time the principles of Church government were debated in the light of Scripture."²² (Underlining my own.) "In November 20, 1572, a presbytery, or (as we should now call it) a kirk-session, was constituted at Wandsworth; it was the first attempt to organize Presbyterianism in the country."²³ It must be pointed out that the Presbyterians did not wish to destroy the Establishment but only to change the government of the Church so that the Church of England would be presbyterian rather than episcopal in polity. There was strong support for the Puritan movement both in the church and the nation. However, Elizabeth, whose primary concern was not religious, but political, did not feel kindly toward any change in the

22. Ibid., p. 40.

23. Ibid.

Settlement of Religion which she had established. She believed national unity required Church unity and, to Elizabeth, this meant uniformity. Nevertheless two things had happened. Episcopacy, which had replaced papalism, had experienced a two-fold challenge, the one, the rise of Presbyterian polity, the other, the bringing of the government of the church to the test of Scripture. This later development was to have still farther reaching consequences.

Toward the end of Elizabeth's reign another conception of the church began to emerge. There were those who desired to "separate" from the state church, rather than to change its structure, and to establish religious communities on the basis of an entirely new doctrine of the church. They were challenging not only the polity of the church but were propounding a new theory of its nature. Neither the Continental nor the English Reformation had concerned themselves, primarily, with the doctrine of the church. Episcopacy and presbyterianism both agreed that,

The catholic or universal Church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect that have been, were, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof....The visible Church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel not confined to one nation, (as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children; and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no

ordinary possibility of salvation.²⁴

The new conception of the church which now arose was that of "believers" "gathered" in Christ, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, rather than the whole community of citizens, baptized in infancy, and so conceived of as regenerate, forming the church. This represented the appearance in England of Anabaptist teaching from the Continent. It was the doctrine of the "believer's" church with the polity of Congregationalism. The leaders were Browne, Barrow, Greenwood and Penry. According to Dr. A. C. Underwood, "there were Separatist churches of the Congregational Order ten or more years before 1580."²⁵ Williston Walker describes Browne's teaching as follows:

According to Browne, the only church is a local body of experiential believers in Christ, united to Him and to one another by a voluntary covenant. Such a church has Christ as its immediate head, and is ruled by officers and laws of His appointment. Each is self-governing and chooses a pastor, a teacher, elders, deacons, and widows, whom the New Testament designates; but each member has responsibility for the welfare of the whole. No church has authority over any other, but each owes to other brotherly helpfulness.²⁶

The Church of England which had been tolerant of the demands of Puritans began to stiffen in opposition to these new

24. Westminster Confession of Faith.

25. Underwood, A History of the English Baptists (London: 1947), p. 32.

26. Walker, op. cit., p. 461.

conceptions of the church and to develop an apologetic for Anglicanism. Elizabeth, resorting to the use of the secular power, now developed the court of the High Commission giving it almost unlimited power to suppress heresy. In 1593, Barrow, Greenwood, and Penry were hanged.

The ascension of James I, who was also King of Scotland where Presbyterianism had triumphed, caused the Puritans to hope that Presbyterianism might become the polity of the national church. James, however, hated Presbyterianism because he had experienced its democratic tendencies in Scotland. His dictum "no bishop, no King" is famous. He ignored the Millenary Petition²⁷ (1603) and promised to "make the Puritans conform themselves or else harry them out of the land." One result of this victory for the Episcopalians was to cause them to enact by Convocation, "a series of canons elevating into church law many of the declarations and practises"²⁸ of the Church of England, thus giving to English episcopacy a more fixed character. In spite of James's rejection of Presbyterianism, however, the Puritans increased in number and political power. While James, by granting the "Authorized Version" of the Bible in 1611, provided still further for the ferment which was to follow in

27. Gee and Hardy, op. cit., pp. 508-512.

28. Walker, op. cit., p. 464.

English life, by making it possible for all Englishmen to read the Scriptures for themselves and to arrive at their own interpretations of religious matters.

James's troubles with the church had not only to do with the struggle between episcopacy and presbyterianism and the emergent congregationalism but also with another new conception of the church which appeared during his reign. Elements of the body of churches, which later came to be known by the name Baptist, made their appearance. John Smyth, who had organized a community of believers, formed a church at Gainsborough about 1602. Smyth and his congregation, under pressure of persecution, exiled themselves to Amsterdam. In Amsterdam (1608) Smyth baptized himself and then some of his followers, forming a church, "not by the Old Testament ceremony of covenanting," but "as a New Testament church of people baptized on profession of their repentance and faith in Christ."²⁹ Thus with Smyth there came into existence another conception of the church differing from the Church of England and Presbyterianism in its fundamental conception and in polity. It differed also in fundamental conception from the Congregationalists but adopted the congregational principle of government. Although Smyth died in Holland,

29. Underwood, op. cit., pp. 37-38, quoted from Works, edited by Whitley, II, 326.

Dr. Underwood says, "he may be regarded as the father and founder of the organized Baptists of England and of the General Baptists in particular."³⁰ The Baptists presented a new doctrine of the church, an independent type of polity, a new conception of the sacraments, a rigid insistence on the complete separation of church and state, and in certain cases replaced Calvinistic theology by Arminian. Helwys, Smyth's successor, brought a group of his followers back to England and in 1612 formed the first Baptist church on English soil.

The history of church organization in England was now to take a completely new turn, one which was short-lived but which presaged much for the future. Charles I was an ardent Episcopalian ably supported by Laud, Bishop of London and later Archbishop of Canterbury, who believed that there could be "no true church without bishops."³¹ Charles failed nevertheless to understand the growing public sentiment and a series of events, both political and religious, led to the Civil War, (1642), the abolition of episcopacy (1643), Charles's execution (1649), the setting up of the Commonwealth with Oliver Cromwell as Protector, and the first attempt at religious toleration in England. Cromwell's army was a body

30. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

31. Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 468.

of religious enthusiasts, passing under many names and due, mainly to their influence, a large degree of toleration existed in the land.³² The Christian religion was declared to be the religion of England. Religious toleration was a novel idea for Englishmen and, while it was not complete, it provided a new conception of the place and function of religion in a nation.

During this same period still another interpretation of the doctrine of the church and a new conception of church polity arose, known as Quakerism, but later officially called the Society of Friends. As Quakerism will be treated by itself at a later stage in this thesis it is sufficient here to indicate the general nature of its structure. Quakerism, founded by George Fox, denied the truth of the outward and visible church, claiming that the true church was invisible and of the spirit. A minimum of organization became necessary which took the form of a connexional system served by a travelling ministry. Under the Commonwealth the Quakers suffered persecution, not for their religious beliefs, but for their refusal to take oaths.

The sixth and last form of ecclesiastical organization to appear in this period was Methodism. The first Methodist

32. Gee and Hardy, op. cit., pp. 574-585.

Societies were organized in 1739. The appearance of Methodist organization can only be appreciated rightly when seen in this unfolding succession of church polities in which a nation was shaping in institutional form its grasp of the Christian faith. Wesley was concerned primarily with the Christian religion as a life but his interest in church polity arose from the desire to shape an ecclesiastical mould which would express the complete New Testament church. In this sense he was endeavouring to complete the English Reformation. A complete study of Wesley's organization will follow in a later chapter.

III. The Two Conflicting Streams in English Religious Life

- A. The Absolute Authority of Church and State and the Attempt to Enforce Uniformity Under the Tudors and Stuarts
- B. The Religion of the Inner Life and the Rise of Quakerism

The rise of the several forms of church polity which emerged in England in the two centuries prior to the rise of Methodism have been traced. However, if the development of ecclesiastical organization and the antecedents of Methodism are to be understood, it is necessary to show that two conflicting streams flowed in English religious life. On the

one hand, the Established Church sought to maintain an absolute authority attempting by the use of force to compel conformity to an external religion supported by the law of the land. On the other, many Englishmen, supported by inner conviction and spiritual faith, constantly resisted the cruelty and intolerance of the authorities claiming that faith is inward, spiritual, and that every man has the right to worship according to his interpretation of the Scriptures and of conscience. We will now proceed to trace the record of the intolerant and absolute claim of church and state under the Tudors and Stuarts.

The totalitarian and intolerant character of both church and state under the Tudors and Stuarts was characteristic of the period. It was a legacy of the previous centuries rooted in the claim of the Roman Church to exercise temporal as well as spiritual power. It was not that men desired to be cruel, although the religious movements following the Reformation did teach a new spirit of justice and humanity, but that they were the heirs of an absolutist tradition. It was also true that the rise of each successive religious movement, by its interpretation of the Scriptures, struck at the root of some vested power either in church or state or some power dependent on both. The Stuarts, for instance, were satisfied that episcopacy in the church was the surest bulwark for the

maintenance of kingship through the proclamation of the doctrine of The Divine Right of Kings. The Quakers, who denied the Scriptural truth of the visible church and who, by their interpretation of Scripture, insisted upon the sinfulness of oaths, were therefore striking at the root of royal prerogative and not only were considered heretical from a religious standpoint but also, for the same reason, were judged to be enemies of the nation.

Following the transition brought about by Henry VIII it was necessary to give form and order to the Church of England. This was the more urgent because of the new ideas filtering into England from the Continental Reformation. Edward, through his advisers, passed the First and Second Acts of Uniformity with the determination that all subjects should conform to the Church of England as established by the King and his ministers. The ideal of Uniformity was clearly set forth in the Second Act of Uniformity,³³

....all and every person and persons inhabiting within this realm, or any other of the King's majesty's dominions, shall diligently and faithfully (having no lawful or reasonable excuse to be absent) endeavour themselves to resort to their parish church or chapel accustomed, or upon reasonable let thereof, to some usual place where common prayer and such service of God shall be used in such time of let, upon every Sunday, and other days ordained....

33. Gee and Hardy, op. cit., pp. 369-370.

The introduction to the First Act of Uniformity was conciliatory in tone although penalties were attached. However, the determination to enforce conformity was much more evident in the Second Act of Uniformity.

Mary's Roman Catholic reversal with its bitter persecution and burnings at the stake, was followed by Elizabeth's Protestant reign but with a greater determination than Edward's that there should be one national church with all conforming. Elizabeth restored the Church of England and provided the Elizabethan Settlement. In her reign there appear the first acts against specific religious groups. There are Acts against Jesuits and Seminarists, against Puritans and against Recusants. The primary reason for these acts was the security of the nation, coupled with the determination that there should be only one church within the realm. Cartwright, the Puritan, was driven from Cambridge. Separatists were imprisoned. The court of High Commission became the right arm of episcopal authority. In 1592 Parliament passed a statute ordering banishment for those who challenged the Queen's religious authority. The following year Penry and Greenwood suffered martyrdom and their Congregational followers were forced to seek refuge in Holland.

The Stuarts continued the same policy of enforced uniformity. Their attempt to force episcopacy on Scotland is typical of their attitude. The Baptists emigrated to Holland.

One beneficial offshoot of their repressive measures was the sailing of the Pilgrim Fathers to America, to be followed by thousands of others. Uniformity became an issue developing to such proportions that it was one of the factors which led to the Civil War and the execution of Charles I. The Royalists were mainly Episcopalians and the army Non-conformists.

Under the Commonwealth, as we have said, a new kind of toleration was practiced. This, however, had its limitations since Quakers who refused to take oaths were still imprisoned. The test was not a matter of religious uniformity but of obedience to constituted civil authority. Cromwell declared the Christian religion to be the religion of the nation but he proceeded against those who appeared to challenge the civil authority, even although for religious reasons. Zarek, dealing with Cromwell's difficulties in connection with the new idea of religious freedom, writes,

Cromwell declared the Christian religion, contained in the Bible, to be the religion of the nation--but just after this, as political ruler, he had to proceed against the sect of the Levellers, who lived the primitive life of the early Christians. The sect was a danger to him. His commissioners also visited fresh persecution on the growing sect of the Quakers. At the same time he proclaimed freedom of conscience, entirely in the spirit of the propagandist John Milton, in these undying words:

"Every sect says, oh give me liberty!

Liberty of conscience is a natural right.I desire it from my heart; I have prayed for it. I have watched for the day to see union and right understanding between the Godly people--Scots, English, Jews, Gentiles, Presbyterians, Independents, Anabaptists, and all."

"The whole principle of religious toleration," says Roosevelt, "is summed up in these brief sentences." Already, however, many people saw the deep inconsistency in Cromwell's attitude. Trembling with anger, Vavasor Powell groaned: "Lord, wilt Thou that Oliver Cromwell or Jesus Christ rule over us?" And an army chaplain with Cromwell's troops exclaimed to the soldiers: "Woe to you if you now fight under the banner of the Beast!" The man who was out to establish the realm of the saints by force appeared to them as the Beast of the Apocalypse....The "iron hand" of the Lord Protector lay as heavily on the country as the power of the king and his helpers had done. Once more England was filled with unrest.³⁴

In 1655 Cromwell issued a proclamation "against Quakers, Ranters, and others."³⁵ Also, in 1655 an order was issued against the teaching or preaching of any sequestered or ejected minister.³⁶

The Restoration, with the return of the Stuarts, brought the restoration of the ecclesiastical establishment and an increased insistence upon uniformity and cruel persecutions for those who dissented. The Uniformity Act passed in 1662 opens as follows, "Whereas in the first year of the late

34. Zarek, op. cit., pp. 66-67.

35. Gee and Hardy, op. cit., p. 582.

36. Ibid., p. 582.

Queen Elizabeth, there was one uniform order of common service and prayer, and of the administration of sacraments, rites and ceremonies, in the Church of England....."³⁷ This Act was followed in 1664 by the Conventicle Act and in the year following by the Five Mile Act. The Uniformity Act required an oath from every clergyman giving his assent to all that was prescribed in the Act including that it was not lawful "upon any pretense whatsoever, to take up arms against the King." These provisions were aimed at the Puritans and between fifteen hundred and two thousand ministers refusing to take the oath were deprived of their livings. Those who previously had not conformed for reasons of conscience were now placed in the position of Dissenters, hence the reason for the Conventicle and Five Mile Acts which prohibited the presence of any one in attendance at a "service not in accordance with the Prayer Book," attended by more than five or more persons not of the same household, the penalties for which were fine, imprisonment and ultimate transportation and also prohibited an ejected clergyman living within five miles of any incorporated town or within the same distance from the former place of his ministry.

Charles in 1672 issued a Declaration of Indulgence which granted the right of public worship to Protestant Dissenters

37. Ibid., p. 600.

but this was really aimed at improved conditions for Roman Catholics. In reply, Parliament withdrew the Indulgence and passed the Test Act which, though aimed at Roman Catholics, bore heavily on Protestant Dissenters and so no relief was secured. The Second Conventicle Act, 1670, provided that the fines for attendance could be collected from any attendant. James II who was a Roman Catholic and desired to reestablish Roman Catholicism in England, issued a Declaration of Indulgence in 1687, which granted full religious toleration but its intention was so obvious that Dissenters sided with Churchmen in opposition. In 1688 William and Mary became joint sovereigns of England. About four hundred clergymen refused the oath to the new sovereigns, and were "deprived." These formed the Nonjuror party. The Toleration Act of 1689, which granted a conditional toleration, made provision for the numerous forms of nonconformist worship.

The period from the Restoration to the Revolution under William and Mary was one of bitter persecution and hardship for all who were unable, for reasons of conscience, to conform to the Anglican establishment. No one can hope to understand the religious background of the Wesley family (Samuel Wesley was born in 1662 and became rector of Epworth in 1697) and the significance of the change in religious

affiliation made by Samuel and Susanna Wesley who does not know the record of impassioned savagery which characterized King and Court, as well as prelate and priest against the nonconforming brethren who feared God more than they feared suffering. The most unholy passions were given free expression far beyond anything warranted by the political situation. The Church of England forever must carry this dark and ugly blot. Charity and Christian grace, even amongst the professed leaders of religion, were almost non-existent, for barbarous cruelty, fear and ecclesiastical prejudice had supplanted the nobler graces. An incident recorded in Sewell gives an inkling of the uneasiness and guilt of conscience of the persecuting authorities. In the report of the trial of William Penn and William Mead, the chairman of the jury, one Edward Bushel, refused to condemn the Quakers much to the displeasure of the Mayor. "I have," said Bushel, "done according to my conscience." This so displeased the Mayor that he said, "That conscience of yours would cut my throat; but I will cut yours so soon as I can."³⁸

Penn attacked the expensive living of the beneficed clergy. He wrote,

If the money which is expended in every parish, there being near 10,000 in the

38. Sewell, History of the Quakers, etc., II, 291.

land, in those unnecessary, vain, nay sinful fashions and entertainments, as laces, jewels, embroideries, ribbons, presents, plays, treats, balls, tavernes, unnecessary attendance of servants, horses, coaches:were collected into a public stock, which would indubitably amount to several hundred thousand pounds a year, there might be reparation to the broken tenant, work-houses erected, where the able might at easy labour procure a plentiful subsistence, and the unable and aged might have such an annuity as would free the land from beggars.³⁹

Attacks of this kind drove the clergy into a mad fury because of their unmistakable truth.

The Acta Martyrum paints the horrors of the persecutions of the Quakers. The prisons were crowded. There were five hundred Quakers in prison in London alone in 1661; in 1665, the year of the plague, there were two thousand Quakers languishing in the prisons of the city of London.⁴⁰

Bready writing of the period following the Restoration and the Anti-Puritan legislation says,

The fear and fury now "roused by the revival of a foe that seemed to have been crushed," registered itself in the Five Mile Act (1665)--the crowning infamy of the Anti-Puritan Code. This Act presented a re-hashed and highly-spiced statement of the bitterest clauses in the foregoing legislation; and, on the expelled clergymen refusing to subscribe--as apparently all did--they "were forbidden under penalty of £40 and six months imprisonment, to approach within five miles of any corporate

39. Quoted in Zarek, op. cit., p. 114.

40. Ibid., p. 114; Green, op. cit., p. 625.

town, or borough, or of any parish in which they had previously taught or preached." (quoted from Dr. Lodge, Political History of England, VIII, 69f.). The Act was applied to schoolmasters as well as clergymen. Hence, torn and tortured by persecution, Puritanism was almost completely severed from its spiritual and cultural roots. Not for twenty-five years till the passing of the Toleration Act by William and Mary, did Protestant Dissenters enjoy even the semblance of corporate liberty; and even then the measure granted them was small. Remembering that for a considerable period more than 4,000 Quakers and Baptists--to say nothing of Presbyterians, Independents, etc.--were in gaol through the fury of this Anti-Puritan Purge, is it surprising that in a later and more industrialized age, Puritan Dissenters often carried the doctrines and dogmas of Laissez-faire too far?

Professor G. M. Trevelyan, commenting on the results of this Code of Persecution, points out that Puritans were not only "excluded from the Universities and from their natural share in social and political influence," but were actually "driven out of polite society." The loss inflicted by this Code upon "Puritan Culture," Professor Trevelyan thinks, "was never completely made good." Puritans, for a generation, were as Babylonian Captives in their native land.

The spirit of the whole Cavalier Purge is reflected by the fact that even Milton, for a time, was hurled into prison. Dire difficulty was experienced in procuring publication for Paradise Lost: it was ordered to be burned by the common hangman; and Milton, finally reduced to a state of penury that compelled him to sell his library, could get but £5 for the copyright of the immortal Puritan epic.⁴¹

41. Bready, England Before and After Wesley, pp. 23-4.

The sufferings of the saintly Richard Baxter (1615-1691) show the ruthless attempt of the ruling powers of State and Church to enforce Uniformity. Baxter who would, possibly, have accepted a modified episcopacy and who stood for sound constitutional government in the nation, was arrested and dragged to prison. The preaching-house, which he had built in London, was closed after he had preached there but once. His books and goods were distrained. Finally, his encounter with Judge Jeffreys of the "Bloody Assizes" is an example of one of the worst perversions of justice on record in England.⁴² John Bunyan likewise spent twelve years in prison from 1660 onwards because of his refusal, for conscience sake, to comply with the terms of the Conventicle and Five Mile Acts.⁴³

Both Samuel Wesley and Susanna Annelsey (later the mother of the Wesleys), were born in the parsonages of Puritan ministers who, for conscience sake, found it impossible to conform to the religious principles which had triumphed at the Restoration. Although each one embraced the Church of England, turning their backs on the convictions of their forebears, yet their earliest recollections must have been of religious persecution and bitter intolerance which created

42. "Richard Baxter," Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. III, 14th ed.

43. "John Bunyan," Ibid., Vol. IV, 14th ed.

hardship and suffering for them in their earlier years.

It naturally would be assumed that the Toleration Act of 1689 would have established complete religious toleration and brought to an end the bigotry of the English authorities but the truth was otherwise. The English Establishment sought to preserve its autocratic power and surrendered only what was wrested from it by force of public opinion and the voting power of the electorate.

Wesley tried to defend the position which he took in the interview with Bishop Butler in Bristol that as the fellow of a college he enjoyed certain liberties which transcended diocesan boundaries and freed him from the direction of the local bishop, while as an ordained priest of the Church of England he claimed immunity from the terms of the Conventicle Act. However, the wording of the Act was such that he was not able to maintain this position and had it not been for influence at Court the Methodists might have suffered more grievously than they did.

We are indebted to Dr. Leslie Church for a careful study of the several Acts and a clear statement of the peculiar position in which Wesley found himself. Dr. Church writes as follows:

The attempt to secure uniformity in public worship, even by compulsion involving civil penalties, persisted from Elizabethan days till the Act of 1812 which repealed the Five

Mile Act and the Conventicle Act. During the first fifty years of Methodist development the chief difficulty lay in the interpretation of the Conventicle Acts of 1664 and 1670, and the Toleration Act of 1689.... Having passed the Act of Uniformity (1662) which has been described as "a powerful lethal weapon" and which had a cruel incidence on many ministers and preachers of irreproachable lives, it struck at their congregations through the Conventicle Act in 1664....The details of this earlier Act only concern us in so far as they define the meaning of a "conventicle" and the range of responsibility. This definition was retained and was operative during the whole of Wesley's lifetime.... It is evident from the passage that the ban included meeting in the open air.... The first Conventicle Act was a temporary measure, but when the time limit had ended, the "Nonconformists" remained as determined, even as sturdy as ever. A new Act was therefore passed in 1670 which was, in general, the natural successor of those which had gone before. It added, however, to the definition, a few words which were to impose a heavy burden on the first Methodists. Not only did it repeat the description of inhabited houses with their yards and grounds, but it continued: "or if it be in a house, field or place where there is no family inhabiting"....Nor did the full significance of it dawn on the keen mind of John Wesley....In 1689 some relief was granted by the passing of the Toleration Act which exempted Protestant Dissenters who so called themselves. The title makes its purpose plain. "An Act for Exempting their Majesties Protestant Subjects, Dissenting from the Church of England, from the penalties of certain laws." The Conventicle Act was specified as one to which this new measure referred. The tragedy was that, whilst it provided alleviation for those who professed themselves "Protestant Dissenters," it excluded such as still

insisted they were members of the Church of England. After 1689 meetings of Protestant Dissenters even in the so-called "Conventicles" could be legalized, but the position of Methodists was unprotected.⁴⁴

Dr. Church later quotes Dr. Simon.

The effect of all this legislation on early Methodism has been summarized by Dr. J. S. Simon: "From 1739 to 1791 Wesley lived under the shadow of the Conventicle Act. At first he stoutly denied that the Act applied to his meetings. Then he began to yield, and some of his Preaching-houses, and private houses in which the Methodists worshipped and met for 'the exercises of religion' were registered under the Toleration Act. At last he had to abandon his position."⁴⁵

We quote still another paragraph from Dr. Church to show how involved the rise of the organization of Methodism was with the civil law.

If the condition of the people in the little Societies, without any constant or adequate supervision, is to be appreciated one must consider some points in closer detail. Neither the people themselves, nor in many cases, the local magistrates were competent to interpret the Acts. The nicety of the distinction between Methodists still in association with the Church of England and "Protestant Dissenters" was not at first appreciated. Presently there was the further question of the licensing of Methodist preachersa further distinction between the "local" and the "travelling" though not

44. Church, The Early Methodist People (London: 1948), pp. 42-44.

45. Ibid., p. 45.

ordained preacher. Even then a further discrimination had to be made between the "local" preacher who decided to wander far afield on self-determined tours, and the man who was definitely appointed by Wesley himself. During the formative years of what was to become a definite and distinct communion of the Christian Church, it was inevitable that such problems should remain for years undetermined, and that the usage and circumstance should vary widely.⁴⁶

Within Wesley's lifetime Methodism became a great and honoured religious system and Wesley was widely revered but only in so far as he availed himself of the terms for Dissenting communions was he technically free of the restrictive terms of the law. It is to the credit of the Church of England and especially of those Bishops who had power over him that they did not proceed against him. Methodism was an organized and separated religious body for some years before the law of England granted toleration in religious matters.

The Religion of the Inner Life and the Rise of Quakerism

As against the stream of English religious life which was external in character and believed in the use of force there was another stream, which moved at the farthest pole from this, believing that the issues of life are in the

46. Ibid., pp. 45-46.

heart, that the nature of religion is the life of God in the soul of man by faith, that only trust and love can free this power and communicate it to others.

The learned always had had the Scriptures but had not read them. The discovery of the art of printing had made the Bible available to every man. In England, the small Geneva Bibles were carried to every hamlet and the most isolated rural districts. Men and women met together to listen to the reading of the Bible. It was the Word of Scripture which impressed them, not the book. They had little learning and few distractions and among them these new ideas were as seed sown on virgin soil. They had ample time for thought and as they followed their simple crafts, the power of the spirit took root in their minds with future consequences for English life.

Medieval religion rested in authority, the authority of the church. The English episcopacy added to this some authority in Scripture. The Puritans claimed that authority rested on the Bible alone. However, as simple English folk listened to the reading of the Scriptures it was the Word within the Bible which their untutored ears discerned and that Word awakened faith. This faith gave them a new life-centre and moved them in ways strange to the traditional

pattern.⁴⁷ This new order they believed did not rest in externals either in state or church but in faith in God as power. Consequently throughout the land there was a new expectancy.

The "groan of pity and horror" which burst from the silent crowd at Whitehall when the executioner lifted the King's head to view reverberated to the farthest parts of England yet at the same time the coming of the Commonwealth satisfied their expectant longing. The "kingdom of righteousness" they believed to be at hand. Many men left their homes and became soldiers of the Commonwealth taking their ideas of hope and expectation with them. However, as the contest of force was prolonged and as the evil remained although the Royalists were suppressed many became disillusioned. They believed they must seek for the truth not amid the external institutions of the world but in the heart. The true church must be of the spirit, as the power of God within.

George Fox (1624-1691) was one of those into whose soul the Scriptures had poured their troublesome truth. Anabaptist ideas had also filtered in from the Continent.⁴⁸ The existing churches seemed to Fox to concern themselves only with superficialities, none seemed concerned with Truth.

47. Jones, The Faith and Practice of the Quakers (London: 1927), pp. 18-24.

48. Walker, op. cit., p. 368.

Even those that held to the authority of the Bible seemed content to rest on the book. Fox became "convinced" of the Word behind the Word. "It is not the scriptures from which all teachings come, but the Holy Spirit." He became "convinced" of God in the soul; the "Truth" was already within every man.

After much waiting and inner struggle Fox felt led to go forth and "publish" his message.⁴⁹ The "Word" within the Word, Christ Himself as living spirit within the heart, the "Voice" of the Eternal speaking through the conscience, "Truth" as a living obedience which "self must serve rather than Truth serving self" was Fox's uncompromising challenge. In 1647, two years before the King's execution he began to "declare Truth" and Quakerism was born.

It was in the seven years following that the movement was built up. Travelling up and down the country, led by the spirit, Fox gathered up the little companies of seeking men and women who had been "waiting" for the prophet whom they believed God would send. At first they called themselves "The Children of Light," the scornful public nicknamed them "Quakers" and finally they adopted the name The Society of Friends.⁵⁰

49. Fox, Journal, p. 18; Jones, George Fox Seeker and Friend (New York: 1930), p. 38.

50. Walker, op. cit., pp. 478-80.

In bringing together the Quaker community Fox was gathering up the spiritual power latent in the lives of tens of thousands of Englishmen who had been quickened by the first contact with the Word of Scripture and who had also come to reject the rule of force.

The disillusionment suffered, through the failure of the Commonwealth to provide peace and righteousness, tended to strengthen the Quaker cause. The problem of serious-minded men was that the use of the Scriptures had produced so many and such varied interpretations in matters of belief that common formulas could not be found to unite them in religious communities. It was this ferment which Quakerism gathered up. George Fox, by the grace of God, simplified the religious issue at a level deeper than the general conflict of opinions and experience. He bore witness to the basic element of Christ as a living, loving, speaking power within the heart. Christ was the seed, the truth, the light, the love in elemental, inner, Christian experience. He rejected all external forms as non-essential and, in practice, obstacles to the life of the Spirit. Church, priest and sacrament were in the heart when the people were "reached" by the living Christ.

In 1652, two years after Charles II had returned to Whitehall, Fox, travelling in the north-west saw a vision of "a great people in white raiment" "coming to the Lord." These were the Seekers of Westmoreland. Zarek writes of this,

His vision was fulfilled to the letter. In this remote country of the north-west of England, between the Irish Sea and Windermere, the Seekers of Westmorland had almost cut themselves off from the outer world, the Puritan preachers and the Church of England clergy could not reach them. Fox, however, gained their confidence, by his very appearance, with his leather clothes and his long hair; there was nothing about him that recalled the professional envoys of the Churches who had tried to reach the secluded people of Westmorland. They invited Fox to a General Meeting. They opened one of their churches to him. But Fox reproved them--once more a sudden inspiration led him to a pregnant, enduring phrase: "The Church is only a place of lime and stone and woodyou have given the title Church, which belongs to the people, to an old house, and you have taught the people to believe so."

Fox sat silently among them; he was waiting for God. He held the Bible in his hands; he opened it, and then he stood up. But the inner voice did not come; he sat down and went on waiting, and with him the people in their white raiment. The time passed. The Seekers looked at him, and in his features they read what was happening to him: there was no doubt in him, no struggle, only a devout waiting, in the utmost concentration. It was a saintly silence. Then suddenly he stood up again, and his message poured from him, as though another mouth were dictating to him. The Seekers of Westmorland believed that he was the preacher for whom they had been waiting. They all went over to the Quakers. Fox himself gave this explanation of this remarkable first mass conversion: "The wonderful preparation for the Quaker experience in these seeking souls who spend one day a week in fasting and prayer and in waiting for the Day of Redemption."⁵¹

51. Zarek, op. cit., pp. 79-80.

Within two or three decades Quakerism had become one of the most powerful forces in seventeenth century England. Its numbers represented one in every five of population. Many too were persuaded of its challenging truth who did not identify themselves with the movement.

Nothing ever carried English national life back to reality more markedly than Quakerism. In the political field unreality was challenged. Cromwell, Fox charged, "to lay down his crown at the feet of Jesus."⁵² To the administration of justice, to moral and social questions, to theology and religion Fox brought the test of a simplicity so real yet so devastating that nothing could escape and all English life since has felt the power of this truth. Many of our finest treasures of righteousness and freedom have sprung from Quaker influence upon English life.

Quakerism was a new element which had come into English life. It was an expression of the English spirit when touched by the power of God. It revealed to the nation the spirit of Christ in contrast to the ruthlessness of an authoritarian church which tried to make itself absolute. The English conscience refused to submit and be shackled. As Green says truth though delayed a hundred years yet came to

52. Ibid., p. 70.

a finer, gentler and more spiritual expression in that the truth of religion was shown to be of the inner life, the presence of God in the soul.

Only fifty years elapsed from the peak of Quaker activity to the organization of the first Methodist Societies. Without Quakerism and the religion of the inner life in the seventeenth century it is safe to say the rise of Methodism would have been impossible in the eighteenth. In his turn Wesley in his ceaseless journeyings came as the prophet whom God had sent. He came to the children and grandchildren of those who had known or heard of the truth that religion is inward and personal and of the heart. Just as there were many reasons for the unprecedented rise of Quakers so there were many reasons for the equally significant development of Methodism. But both partook of the same inner faith. Wesley, who knew history and believed in the visible Church and at the same time knew the experience of inward faith, was the destined instrument for bringing together these two streams to provide in organizational form a truer, more comprehensive doctrine of the church than any of these single streams were capable of doing. Wesley's objective was to create in England a truly comprehensive New Testament church containing all the elements revealed in Scripture. It cannot be laid to Wesley's charge that he was prevented from

accomplishing this nor even to the Church of England but rather that the power of Christian truth had not sufficiently leavened the church and society. As always the prophet saw more than circumstances allowed him to realize. The truth must do its invisible work till men are able to receive the reality which the prophet saw by faith.

The means by which New Testament reality should become the daily experience of every Englishman was a problem constantly before the mind of Wesley. How heavily the matter weighed and how earnestly he sought the solution may be seen from these words written in 1746 in his Preface to the Sermons:

But some may say I have mistaken the way myself, although I take upon me to teach it to others. It is probable many will think this; and it is very possible that I have. But I trust, whereinsoever I have mistaken, my mind is open to conviction. I sincerely desire to be better informed. I saw to God and man, "What I know not, teach thou me!"

Are you persuaded you see more clearly than me? It is not unlikely that you may. Then treat me as you would desire to be treated yourself upon a change of circumstances. Point me out a better way than I have yet known. Show me it is so by plain proof of Scripture. And if I linger in the path I have been accustomed to tread, and am therefore unwilling to leave it, labour with me a little; take me by the hand, and lead me as I am able to bear. But be not displeased if I entreat you not to bear me down in order to quicken my pace: I can go but feebly and slowly at best; then, I should not be able to go at all....

Nay, perhaps, if you are angry, so shall I be too, and then there will be small hopes of finding the truth....For, how far is love, even with many wrong opinions, to be preferred before truth itself without love....The God of love forbid we should ever make the trial! May He prepare us for the knowledge of all truth, filling our hearts with all His love, and with all joy and peace in believing.⁵³

revival almost inevitable. For, the Wesleyans and the English
 situation produced the eighteenth century Evangelical Re-
 vival. It was England's good fortune that, at the right
 moment, a man of Wesley's broad and deep strength was avail-
 able to lead the Revival. His revival was, of course, to
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Englishmen, unlike Americans, never succumbed to the
 limitations which seventeenth century Calvinism imposed upon
 God and human destiny. Nor in the realm of politics did their
 inherent sense of freedom bow to the fetters of the authori-
 tarian Establishment. From the English Reformation to the
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 turned to the free country of the Christian Church.

Wesley possessed a wide breadth of scholarship, a type
 of mind that insisted on penetrating to fundamentals, a com-
 plete fearlessness due to lack of self-interest, and the
 will to persist till every obstacle had been surmounted.

53. John Wesley, The Standard Sermons of John Wesley,
 edited and annotated by Edward H. Sugden (London: 1933),
 pp. 33-34.

CHAPTER II

WESLEY FOUNDER AND ORGANIZER

The spiritual power latent in the life of the English people, as a result of the religious movements of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, made a major evangelical revival almost inevitable. God, the Wesleys and the English situation produced the eighteenth century Evangelical Revival. It was England's good fortune that, at the right moment, a man of Wesley's broad and deep strength was available to lead the Revival. Due tribute goes, of course, to others who made a contribution.

Englishmen, unlike Scotsmen, never succumbed to the limitations which seventeenth century Calvinism imposed upon God and human destiny. Nor in the realm of polity did their inherent sense of freedom bow to the fetters of the authoritarian Establishment. From the English Reformation to the nineteenth century there was a steady increase of those who turned to the free conception of the Christian Church.

Wesley possessed a wide breadth of scholarship, a type of mind that insisted on penetrating to fundamentals, a complete fearlessness due to lack of self-interest, and the will to persist till every obstacle had been surmounted. Methodism had the general background of English ecclesiastical development and the particular roots which we shall trace

in the succeeding chapters but Wesley was the founder and organizer who moulded all this into an ecclesiastical system. His convictions and principles gave to Methodism its distinctive faith and structure. The organization came into being, not as an end in itself, but as a means to an end, that end being Wesley's determination to reestablish New Testament Christianity in England and consequently the necessity to reproduce the fundamental principles which governed the New Testament Church. Hence, a brief account of Wesley, his ancestry and training, the motives which governed his life and the principles which controlled the formation of the Wesleyan Societies is in order.

Wesley, Ancestry, The Epworth Rectory and the Unfolding Pattern of Wesley's Life

Wesley was born at Epworth in Lincolnshire June 28 (June 17 O. S.), 1703. He was the fifteenth child and fifth son (nine children died in infancy) of Samuel and Susanna Wesley. Charles, his younger brother, who was associated with him more especially in the earlier stages of the Revival and who influenced the movement strongly by hymn-writing, was born in 1707. Wesley attended Charterhouse and Oxford. He was ordained deacon in 1725, elected a fellow of Lincoln College in 1726 and ordained a priest of the Church of England in 1728. He remained at Oxford, declining to become

his father's successor at Epworth, till he set out for Georgia, as a missionary to the Indians, in 1735.

Wesley's conversion came in 1738, after his return to England, while he and Charles were in association with Peter Bohler, the Moravian, and others. The first distinctly Methodist Society was founded in London "in the latter end of the year 1739." Wesley already, early in that year, had commenced work in Bristol. In 1742 the work spread to Newcastle, later to Cornwall and to Ireland. In the 1760's Wesleyan Societies were formed in America by Methodist emigrants. In 1784 Wesley ordained workers for America and drew up the Deed of Declaration providing for the continuity of Methodism after his personal leadership ceased. Wesley continued in sustained activity, providing a personal and centralized leadership for Methodism till his death in 1791.

Wesley, who in the early stages of the Revival, had accepted the reproach of "enthusiast" and leader of a fanatical movement, came in his later years to a place of great prominence in the national life, being recognized as a religious leader and a power for righteousness. Amongst his own followers his benign countenance and saintly manner caused him to be honoured as a father in God by tens of thousands who owed their eternal salvation to his unselfish courage, Christian grace and organizing genius. Following his death Wesley's stature has steadily increased till he ranks with

the greatest religious leaders of all time and with each succeeding generation the significance of his contribution to Christendom is more fully appreciated and more intelligently understood.

Dr. Coke and Mr. Moore have left us the following account of his personality and manner of life:

Respecting such a man, even the smallest particulars will not be unpleasing. He was, in his person, rather below the middle size, but remarkably well proportioned. He had what some call a clean constitution in a high degree. He seemed not to have an atom of superfluous flesh, and yet was muscular and strong. His whole person was expressive of the activity and health, which generally arises from strong bodily powers, preserved by temperance and exercise. His face was remarkably fine, even to old age. The freshness of his complexion continued to the last week of his life. His whole countenance was highly expressive and interesting: it has often been observed that many who were deeply prejudiced against him have been changed in a moment into sentiments of veneration and esteem, on being introduced into his presence.

He was a pattern of neatness and simplicity, not only in his person, but in every circumstance of his life. In his chamber and study, during his winter months of residence in London, we believe there never was a book misplaced, or even a scrap of paper left unheeded. He could enjoy every convenience of life; and yet, he acted in the smallest things, like a man who was not to continue an hour in one place. He seemed always at home, settled, satisfied and happy; and yet was ready every hour to take a journey of a thousand miles.

His conversation was always pleasing, and frequently interesting and instructive

in the highest degree. By reading, traveling, and continual observation, he had a fund of knowledge, which he dispensed with a propriety and perspicuity, that we believe has been rarely equalled. The Greek and Latin classics were as familiar to him as the most common English authors; and so were many of the best French writers. Yet, though so richly furnished, we believe those of the most improved taste have never observed in him the affectation of learning. He joined in every kind of discourse that was innocent. As he knew that all nature is full of God, he became all things to all men in conversing on these subjects.¹

Wesley's ancestry, on both sides, had their roots in the thick of the seventeenth century religious struggle. The Wesleys, or Westleys, parents of Wesley, were a well-known English family and, by choice, were of Nonconformist religious conviction. The grandfather John Westley was ejected in 1662 for dissenting religious opinions. Samuel, John's father, as a young man, returned to the Church of England of his own choice.

Samuel Wesley married Susanna Annesley, the youngest daughter of Dr. Samuel Annesley, the vicar of St. Giles, Cripplegate, who also in 1662 gave up his living and formed a Nonconformist congregation. Susanna, the mother of the Wesleys, at an early age developed Church of England sympathies and was confirmed in that communion.

1. Coke and Moore, Life of the Rev. John Wesley (London: 1792), pp. 524-25.

In 1768 Wesley wrote to his brother Charles, "But so far as I can learn, such a thing has scarce been for these thousand years before, as a son, father, grandfather, atavus, tritavus, preaching the gospel, nay, the genuine gospel, in a line. You know, Mr. White, sometime Chairman of the Assembly of Divines, was my grandmother's father."²

The Wesleys had a struggle meeting the needs of the family, endured persecution to the extent of the burning down of the Rectory, and experienced some marital and family infelicity, the daughters especially, living unhappy lives due mainly to eighteenth century social conditions.

The mother taught the children at home and their lives were formed largely according to her pattern. John remained strongly under his mother's influence until her death in 1742. She was a woman of unusual intellect, common sense and Christian grace. There is no doubt that the strength of her character was transmitted to Methodism through her sons John and Charles. The part which the Nonconformist convictions of the ancestors of the Wesleys played in the ultimate shaping of the Wesleyan movement is not clear but the strong sense of free determination which characterized Early Methodism was quite likely a quality of seventeenth

2. JWL, V, p. 76.

century Nonconformity conveyed largely through Susanna Wesley.

An unfolding pattern is evident in Wesley's life. He was a typical High Church student who in 1739 could say "having been (till very lately) so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order, that I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin if it had not been done in a church."³ In 1725 he experienced an awakening which Maxime Piette, following his Franciscan tradition, calls his conversion.⁴ The Holy Club at Oxford marked the Wesley brothers' interest in fellowship as a means of religious expression and the use of "Method." In Georgia they experimented in the uses of a religious society aided by the Moravians and against strong church opposition. They practised living by "rule."

May 24, 1738 is the date of Wesley's religious conversion which took place at a religious society meeting at Aldersgate, London. The conversion is the great turning-point in Wesley's life. Henceforth positive faith in the redeeming power of God in and through Jesus Christ became the spring of his life.

3. JWJ, II, p. 167.

4. Piette, John Wesley in the Evolution of Protestantism, translated by the Rev. J. B. Howard (London: 1937), p. 306.

Wesley had been active in the work of the religious societies in London and Oxford and following his conversion gave himself enthusiastically to the revival of the Church of England believing that the formation of religious societies for the cultivation of the inner life would be welcomed and would quicken the Church. The Church resented his "enthusiasm" but Wesley continued to hope that it would relent and receive his movement as an "ecclesiola in Ecclesia" but such was not to be.

At Bristol, the year following his conversion, Wesley took over the work which Whitefield had commenced and through preaching in the open-air entered into a new freedom. This experience provided Wesley with the "second blessing" which he began to teach as part of his message. He records in the Journal for Monday, April 2, 1739, "at four in the afternoon I submitted to be more vile, and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation, speaking from a little eminence in a ground adjoining to the city, to about three thousand people."⁵

Societies were formed, field-preaching was carried on, lay-preachers were appointed and rules were drawn up. The first Conference was held in 1744 by which time the first

5. JWJ, II, pp. 172-3.

stage of the organization was virtually complete. Between 1744 and 1749 a second stage in the development of the organization took place. From that time on the development was in expansion and in Wesley's unfolding conception of the church which came in successive stages.

Charles Wesley became less active in itinerant work, and made his major contribution through his hymns, which were of a warm, evangelical piety, creating for him the honoured place of the father of modern hymnody. John Wesley, however, became more determined than ever to press for the evangelization of England by means of religious societies till, by his organizing genius and his conception of the Church, he developed what, as it became more evident to himself and others, must ultimately become a separate branch of the Christian church.

Wesley's Characteristics

There are many characteristics which mark a man as outstanding as Wesley but mention will be made only of the two which were most significant for Early Methodist organization. These were his positive faith and his organizing ability.

Positive Faith

Wesley was a positive believer. He held himself to creative thought. He believed God to be Supreme Goodness.

This goodness was available to every man to the extent to which he had faith to receive it. His conversion was a turning from self-effort to faith in God as revealed in Jesus Christ whose fullness of grace, power and peace were available, so he believed, to everyone who opened his life and received them. Wesley's theology was the faith rooted in experience which trusted that God will give strength in weakness, wisdom in need, light in darkness to those who will believe and appropriate. This is what the Arminian theology of "free grace" meant for Wesley.

This also is why he hated Calvinism. He believed that eighteenth century Calvinism taught limitations upon God and man. To Wesley this was the complete denial of the central New Testament message of God's grace.

At his conversion he had experienced this love. In his adventure in field-preaching he gave expression to the belief that this love was for all men. The early Bristol ministry marked the beginnings of Methodism because it was the practical expression of free grace and the rejection of man-made limitations upon the offer of that good news to all men.

Wesley himself was filled with an expansive faith and freed for service without limitation. This is the clue to the Wesleyan movement and its message. It is also the motive behind the organization. The organization had to be of a kind which would provide an expanding vehicle for a faith

which rejected limitations.

Organizing Ability

The second characteristic was Wesley's organizing ability. His chief natural endowment was a mind which required order. His father's remark about John's not obeying nature unless someone gave him a reason shows that this characteristic existed at an early age. At Oxford he studied and taught logic and moderated the class discussions, which gave him further training to a naturally orderly mind. His writings show the form of orderly thinking. The illustration given by Dr. Telford in the Introduction to the Letters⁶ is an excellent example. The Rules were a product of his necessity to live in an orderly fashion. One of the roots of Methodism as of Methodist organization lay in Wesley's own nature. He was a born "Method-ist."

His controversial writings show this endowment made effective by training. He was always too strong for his attackers. Seventeenth century Calvinism received its death-blow largely from the keenness of Wesley's logic, which forced his opponents to the ultimate conclusions of their creed and revealed its contradiction of the Gospel.

The Minutes constantly reveal the necessity which Wesley

6. JWL, I, XVI.

felt to examine every matter to its roots. This was true of doctrine and equally true of polity.

Wesley was aware that his main strength lay in this area. In 1766 he wrote to Charles,

O insist everywhere on full redemption, receivable by faith alone! Consequently to be looked for now. You are made, as it were, for this very thing. Just here you are in your element. In connexion I beat you; but in strong, pointed sentences you beat me. Go on in your own way, what God has peculiarly called you to. Press the instantaneous blessing: then I shall have more time for my peculiar calling, enforcing the gradual work.⁷

McConnell's comment is, "the quality in Wesley which practically all who have studied his life concede as pre-eminent--his effectiveness as an organizer."⁸ Mumford after noting the tributes paid by Macaulay and Stephen says, "Under God Wesley created Methodism and shaped its development, and at the end of his life it was a noble witness to the spiritual force and powers of organization that God had bestowed upon its leader."⁹

The Motive and "Particular Laws of God" Which Governed Wesley as Organizer

As has been said organization was not a primary concern

7. Ibid., V, 16.

8. McDonnell, John Wesley (Abingdon, New York: 1939), p. 122.

9. Mumford, The Organization of the Methodist Church in the time of John Wesley, LQR (January, 1946), p. 35.

with Wesley but was viewed by him always as means to an end. In his view all ecclesiastical structure was secondary to essential spiritual truth. It was an effect which must result from a prior cause. The prior cause was the personal motive which actuated Wesley's life. His life was governed by one compelling motive which sought a definite objective. His actions which brought into being an ecclesiastical organization were controlled by principles. On the basis of these principles the Wesleyan Societies took their structure providing a channel for the motive and an organized expression for the objective.

Motive

The motive which motivated Wesley's life and actions was his sense of divine call. He went further and did not hesitate to apply the term "extraordinary call" to this sense of vocation. To James Hervey in March, 1739 he wrote, "God in Scripture commands me," and continued, "according to my power, to instruct the ignorant, reform the wicked, confirm the virtuous."¹⁰ In the same letter, (of which Dr. Telford says it "lays bare the secret springs of his labours as an evangelist"),¹¹ Wesley wrote, "This is the work which I know God has called me to....And His providence clearly concurs

10. JWL, I, pp. 285-6.

11. Ibid., preface to letter.

with His word, which has disengaged me from all things else that I might singly attend on this very thing, 'and go about doing good.'¹²

To his brother Charles in June of the same year Wesley wrote,

and to do this I have both an ordinary call and an extraordinary. My ordinary call is my ordination by the Bishop: "Take thou authority to preach the word of God." My extraordinary call is witnessed by the words God doeth by my ministry, which prove that He is with me of a truth in this exercise of my office. Perhaps this might be better expressed in another way: God bears witness in an extraordinary manner that my thus exercising my ordinary call is well-pleasing in His sight.¹³

In 1747 he wrote to John Smith, "But you 'know no call I have to preach up and down, to play the part of an itinerant evangelist.' Perhaps you do not. But I do: I know God hath required it at my hands. To me, His blessing my work is an abundant proof."¹⁴

In 1756 Wesley was still as sure of his divine call for he wrote to Samuel Walker, "I apprehend, indeed, that there ought, if possible, to be both an outward and inward call to this work; yet, if one of the two be supposed wanting, I had

12. Ibid.

13. JWL, I, pp. 322-3.

14. JWL, II, pp. 96-7.

rather want the outward than the inward call. I rejoice that I am called to preach the gospel both by God and man."¹⁵

In 1785 he wrote the famous letter to Charles Wesley in which he declared, "I firmly believe I am a scriptural ἐπίκληστος as much as any man in England or in Europe."¹⁶ It is true he was speaking of his right to ordain nevertheless the statement also bears testimony to his sense of divine call.

Wesley was satisfied that the abundant fruit which resulted from his work was evidence by which God affixed his seal to the extraordinary call. He referred to this frequently and called it the "attestation to my ministry."¹⁷ For him it was the evidence against all gainsayers that he was in a God-appointed course. As quoted above, "my extraordinary call is witnessed by the works God doeth by my ministry, which prove that He is with me of a truth in this exercise of my office."¹⁸

Objective

Wesley stated his objective just as clearly on many occasions and in varying phraseology. It was "to know and

15. Ibid., III, p. 195.

16. Ibid., VII, p. 284.

17. Ibid., II, p. 58.

18. Ibid., I, p. 322.

do the will of God." In the Minutes of 1745 the objective is "for the glory of God and the superior good of souls."

To James Hervey in 1739 he wrote his most famous saying, "I look upon all the world as my parish; thus far I mean, that in whatever part of it I am I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty to declare, unto all that are willing to hear, the glad tidings of salvation."¹⁹

To Charles he wrote in the same year, "God commands me to do good unto all men."²⁰

To Samuel Walker in 1756 he wrote, "I have one point in view--to promote, so far as I am able, vital, practical religion; and by the grace of God to beget, preserve, and increase the life of God in the souls of men."²¹

Wesley wrote to his brother Charles in 1755, "There are many greater things and more immediately necessary (than outward modes of worship) for our people. Holiness of heart and life they want most, and they want it just now."²² Holiness was a favourite term which he defined for his father in 1734, "by holiness I mean....a renewal of the soul in the image of God."²³ To Samuel Walker in the same year (1755) he wrote, "We both contend for the inward kingdom,

19. Ibid., I, p. 286.

20. Ibid., I, p. 322.

21. Ibid., III, p. 192.

22. Ibid., III, p. 135.

23. Ibid., I, p. 168.

the mind that was in Christ Jesus, the image of God to be stamped upon the heart."²⁴

Wesley stated his objective as the spreading of "Scriptural holiness over the land." It was the bringing into being of the New Testament church. What Wesley was trying to get at was not another church but a Christian community, a new kind of society in which a spiritual church would vitalize the community. He was concerning himself with a kind of life and a way of living that believed essential truths, experienced them as faith and power and then got on with the living of a sin-free, problem-victorious life. He had seen enough theology in sterile lives and churchmanship which did not manifest the life of the Spirit.

In "The Character of a Methodist"²⁵ Wesley made clear that he was seeking to bring into being the type of character which the New Testament set forth as marking the true Christian. He was not interested in a body, a sect or a new church. The marks of a Methodist (since people insisted upon that name) were not opinions, words of any sort, actions or any distinctive religious tenets. "A Methodist is one who has the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him"; one who "loves the Lord his God

24. Ibid., III, p. 153.

25. JWW, VIII, pp. 339-347.

with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength. God is the joy of his heart, and the desire of his soul.....And while he always exercises his love to God, by praying without ceasing, rejoicing evermore, and in everything giving thanks, this commandment is written in his heart, "That he who loveth God, love his brother also." And he accordingly loves his neighbour as himself." Wesley saw the vision of restoring the Christian community in the life of both church and nation so that no one could say here is the church and here the church is not for all would be enveloped in the family of Christ, the true New Testament community, the living fellowship of the inspiring and quickening Holy Spirit. "I seek two things in this world--truth and love," he wrote to Richard Thompson in 1755, "Whoever assists me in this search is a friend indeed, whether personally known or unknown."²⁶ "Surely the design of God was to 'bow a nation to his sway.'"²⁷

Particular Laws of God

Wesley was an organizer but not merely for the sake of orderliness. We have seen that he was motivated by a sense of extraordinary call and sought a clearly-defined objective.

26. JWL, III, p. 135.

27. Ibid., V, p. 52.

However, in realization of this end he was at all times governed by what he called "particular laws of God," and what Dr. Eayrs calls "regulative principles." If, then, we are to understand what controlled his choices and determined his actions, it is necessary to outline these "particular laws of God." While it is not possible to be exact in stating these, yet they are reasonably clear in his writings. These principles had come out of Wesley's total religious experience and for him they governed his relation to God, to the universe and to his fellows. They provided the boundaries within which he was free to act in achieving his objective. Hence they have much to do both with the roots and the development of his organization.

Anyone who reads Wesley's letters will be impressed with his frequent reference to the fact that he was governed by "principle."

"I both do and will obey them (the governors of the church) in all things where I do not apprehend there is some particular law of God to the contrary,"²⁸ he said replying to Thomas Church in 1746. In 1756, writing to Nicholas Norton, who had charged him with self-inconsistency in tolerating lay-preaching and not lay-administering, he replies,

28. Ibid., II, p. 235.

it is not true that I am self-inconsistent in so doing. I act on one and the same principle still. My principle (frequently declared) is this: "I submit to every ordinance of man wherever I do not conceive there is an absolute necessity for acting contrary to it." Consistently with this I do tolerate lay-preaching, because there is an absolute necessity for it; inasmuch as, were it not, thousands of souls would perish everlastingly. Yet I do not tolerate lay-administering, because I do not conceive there is any such necessity for it; seeing it does not appear that, if this is not at all, one soul will perish for want of it.

I am therefore so far from self-inconsistency in tolerating the former and not the latter, that I really should be self-inconsistent were I to act otherwise; were I to break, or allow others to break, an ordinance of man, where there is no necessity, I should contradict my own principle, as much as if I did not allow it to be broken where there is."²⁹ The above is an excellent illustration of the working of Wesley's mind and the type of "principle" which controlled the formation of the organization of Methodism.

What, then, were the particular laws of God which hedged in the working of Wesley's motive in seeking to achieve its objective? Wesley did not leave an outline of these laws. They have to be deduced from his writings. Dr. Eayrs lists four regulative principles, namely, "The supreme importance

29. Ibid., III, p. 186.

of Spiritual Intuition and Moral Consciousness; Divine Guidance received through the Holy Scriptures; the Verdict of the Common Sense of Christians; and Practical Value as discovered by Use."³⁰

The particular laws of God which the writer finds to have governed Wesley's actions in establishing the organization of his religious societies were: The centrality of God; Holy Scripture with which Reason and Guidance were conjoined; the Primacy of the Spiritual; the Value of and Necessity for Fellowship; and Adaptation as governed by Principle and Proved by Use. The treatment of these will differ somewhat from the analysis of Dr. Eayrs because the writer believes Wesley's approach was primarily a matter of straight religious conviction and therefore less philosophical than Dr. Eayrs would imply.

(1) The Centrality of God

The Centrality of God, His glory as man's chief end and God's effective operation was the central belief and constant consciousness of Wesley. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit as providential Ruler, personal redeeming Saviour and operative Spirit were the central reality and actuating force of his life.

30. Eayrs, op. cit., p. 227.

"I am a spirit come from God and going to God" summed up his destiny for him. God was the Living God for Wesley. This was the first particular law which governed all else. "I see God sitting upon His throne and ruling all things well," he wrote. In the same letter written to Ebenezer Blackwell and speaking of his wife's desertion, he said,

By the grace of God, I never fret, I repine at nothing, I am discontented with nothing. And to have persons at my ear fretting and murmuring at everything is like tearing the flesh off my bones. I see God sitting upon His throne and ruling all things well. Although, therefore, I can bear this, also--to hear his government of the world continually found fault with (for in blaming the things which He alone can alter we in effect blame Him); yet it is such a burthen to me as I cannot bear without pain, and I bless God when it is removed.

This doctrine of a Particular Providence is what exceeding few persons understand--at least, not practically, so as to apply it to every circumstance of life. This I want, to see God acting in everything, and disposing all for his own glory and his Creature's good.³¹

The closing words of his life were, "The best of all is, God is with us."³²

To understand Wesley and his actions it is necessary to bear in mind this central, practical faith. "His thought

31. JWL, III, p. 139.

32. JWJ, VIII, p. 143.

of God and the universe governed his actions as Church leader."³³ But it was more than his thought because to Wesley God was Himself acting, willing, fulfilling, a Creative Being who operated intelligently and graciously according to the design and by the particular laws which he had ordained. When Wesley obeyed he placed himself in line with this Being and Power. It was on this corner-stone that Methodism was founded.

(2) Holy Scripture

The second particular law of God which governed Wesley's thought and practise was Holy Scripture with which human Reason and Divine Guidance were conjoined. There is a real problem in connection with an interpretation of Wesley's use of Scripture and it arises from the difficulty of giving to Scripture the authoritative place in which he held it and yet the liberty which he took in its application. The clue to this problem is to be found in his recognition of the responsibility which devolves upon man in the gift of human reason and at the same time his belief in the unresting work of the Holy Spirit in relation to the mind and spirit of man.

Wesley followed the tradition of the Protestant Reformation in giving to Holy Scripture the place of supreme

33. Eayrs, op. cit., p. 205.

authority. In this he was in line with his Nonconforming ancestry and, under God, the instrument for the third stage and completion of the English Protestant Reformation. Tyerman says, "He made the word of God the rule of all his actions."³⁴ His writings are filled with instances of the authoritative place he gave to Scripture of which a few will suffice. He wrote, "I allow no other rule, whether of faith or practice, than the Holy Scriptures (1739)."³⁵ "The Scriptures are the touchstone whereby Christians examine all, real or supposed, revelations." (1748)³⁶ "I try every Church and every doctrine by the Bible." (1756)³⁷ In 1765 he asserted, "In 1730 I began to be homo unius libri, to study (comparatively) no book but the Bible."³⁸

Wesley gave his rule for interpreting Scripture as follows: "The general rule of interpreting Scripture is this: the literal sense of every text is to be taken, if it be not contrary to some other texts; but in that case the obscure text is to be interpreted by those which speak more plainly."³⁹

However, human reason and divine guidance were to be used in conjunction with this rule of Holy Scripture. "I

34. Tyerman, op. cit., I, p. 480.

35. JWL, I, p. 285.

36. Ibid., II, p. 117.

37. Ibid., III, p. 172.

38. JWJ, V, p. 117.

39. JWL, III, p. 129.

desire none to receive my words, unless they are confirmed by Scripture and reason," he wrote to John Smith in 1745.⁴⁰ Wesley believed firmly in a sound intellect and in a careful and honest use of it. Speaking of his own century he wrote Joseph Benson in 1770, "Passion and prejudice govern the world, only under the name of reason. It is our part by religion and reason joined, to counteract them all we can."⁴¹ It is significant that his Appeals were written to Men of Reason and Religion. Reason he said was, "The way by which He chiefly leads me."⁴²

But as well as the exercise of reason conjoined with the plain sense of Scripture was the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Wesley was a true heir of the Reformation in his conjoining of the Word and the Spirit. This was not the only function of the third Person of the Trinity according to Wesley as we shall see, but this was a very definite one. Scripture was the "rule," the Holy Spirit was "the guide."

Though the Spirit is our principal leader, yet He is not our rule at all; the Scriptures are the rule whereby He leads us into all truth. Therefore, only talk good English; call the Spirit our "guide," which signifies an intelligent being, and the Scriptures our "rule," which signifies something used by an intelligent being, and all is plain and clear.⁴³

40. Ibid., II, p. 58.

41. Ibid., V, p. 203.

42. Ibid., VIII, p. 154.

43. Ibid., II, p. 117.

Writing to Freeborn Garrettsen (1789), who had been travelling extensively in America, Wesley extended a rebuke and made a sound distinction, showing how clearly he had thought through the principle of Holy Spirit guidance. The letter is quoted in full:

London, January 24, 1789

My Dear Brother,--It signifies but little where we are, so we are fully employed for our good Master. Whether you went, to the east, it is all one, so you were labouring to promote His work. You are following the order of His providence wherever it appeared, as an holy man expressed it, in a kind of holy disordered order. But there is one expression that occurs twice or thrice in yours which gives me some concern: you speak of finding "freedom" to do this or that. This is a word much liable to be abused. If I have plain Scripture or plain reason for doing a thing well. These are my rules and my only rules. I regard not whether I have freedom or no. This is an unscriptural expression and a very fallacious rule. I wish to be in every point, great and small, a scriptural, rational Christian.

In one instance formerly you promised to send me your Journal. Will you break your word because you do not find freedom to keep it? Is not this enthusiasm? O be not of this way of thinking! You know not whither it may lead you. You are called to square your useful life below by reason and by grace. But whatever you do with regard to me you must do quickly, or you will no more in this world.

Your affectionate friend and brother.⁴⁴

44. JWL, VIII, p. 112; also JWL, p. 154.

(3) The Primacy of the Spiritual

The third of Wesley's particular laws of God was the Primacy of the Spiritual. This principle followed from his conception of God and the manner of God's working. The essence of God's creation, including the material, was spirituality. The Father and the Son met life in and through the Person of the Holy Spirit. The fullness of God was available to man through faith which appropriated His attributes. This is what we have called Wesley's positiveness and said to be his most outstanding characteristic. It was for this reason that he hated, not only Calvinism, but all deterministic conceptions. They were so utterly opposed to the experience of God as he knew Him. It was at this point that he made his contribution to the thought of his century. In this, he himself would have said he was just being a New Testament Christian. It was on this principle which he went forward in the work whether in using lay preachers, developing classes, or ordaining. Spiritual reality must be served. When God's will was unmistakable and no ground for hesitation remained, then action must be taken. The real difference between John and Charles Wesley came at this point. His principle was "I am to obey God rather than man,"⁴⁵ while

45. Minutes of Conference, 1745 ("John Bennet's copy") W. H. S. Publications, I, 24; Ibid., p. 47 (1747).

Charles was influenced by persons and institutions.

Conversely, this was the ground upon which he refused to conform to existing institutions and systems which placed limitation upon the expression of the fullness of God. His opposition to Calvinism arose from the fact that he believed it struck at the root and denied the very character of the Most High. It can safely be said that this principle in its operation did more to produce Methodist organization than any other because it was the freedom which this principle allowed which determined so many of Wesley's actions.

(4) The Value of and the Necessity for Fellowship

The fourth particular law of God was the Value of and the Necessity for Fellowship. Wesley used classes and bands and through them the practice of group-wisdom but unless the principle underlying his use and development of these means has been grasped one of the most important convictions of his life will have been missed. Wesley believed in the fellowship of the forgiven. With the prophet Malachi he believed that "they that feared the Lord" should speak "often one to another" and experience the blessings promised and constitute the new society. Wesley's vision was that of a kingdom of holiness, a new order of spiritual righteousness. At first he sought the revival of the Church of England but as the decades passed he came to believe more firmly,

"Church or no church" that the aim should be a New Testament society. The key to such a society was forgiveness, the new life in the soul by God's grace, and the means to such a kingdom was the fellowship of the forgiven. From experience he knew that fellowship was necessary to sustain the new Christian life, also from experience he knew that through the group-wisdom of the redeemed community the most practical suggestions could emerge and these, when tried by other principles and proven in use, he believed to be the wisdom of God. But more than this he believed that in his Methodist communities he was providing the nucleus which, by its expansion, would create the new Christian society. As a matter of fact the full impact of Wesley's faith and his use of fellowship upon eighteenth century society has not yet been completely studied. He believed the God of wisdom and love operated through this fellowship of the forgiven and would operate as widely as that community extended and so provide the answer to our Lord's prayer, "Thy kingdom come on earth." One of his chief charges against the Church of England was that while it provided the externals of religion yet it failed completely to grasp the significance and potential richness of this principle.

(5) Adaptation as Governed by Principle and

Proved by Use

The fifth particular law of God practised by Wesley was

Adaptation as Governed by Principle and Proved by Use. It will be readily seen once the preceding four principles have been stated that this fifth principle did not play as large a part in the rise of Methodist organization as has been commonly believed. Wesley adapted and used. His organizing genius expressed itself in this very thing but it is easy to make too much of this characteristic because when the matter is carefully studied few men have so held themselves to the control of governing principles.

Nevertheless it was a principle with Wesley that if a man or a religious community was to know and do the will of God, trial and error must be practised. One conviction which underlay this belief was that God had revealed fundamentals but expected reasonable creatures to whom the guidance of the Holy Spirit was available to work out the application. For example, he inquired in the 1747 Minutes, "Why is there no determinate plan of Church government appointed in Scripture? Without doubt because the wisdom of God had a regard to this necessary variety."⁴⁶ In the 1746 Minutes he says, "This is the very thing we have wanted." God revealed the Church and the principles for restoring a fallen and perverted world to the order of the kingdom of God but the

46. MS Minutes of Conference, 1947. ("John Bennet's copy") W. H. S. Publications, I, 48.

detail must fall within the scope of guided human adaptation to need.

Dr. Simon, in what is perhaps the most understanding study of the inner life of the Evangelical Revival, writes as follows:

The pattern to which his Societies were unconsciously conformed was contained in the New Testament. Without any previous design, he met "occasions as they arose," and in the end, he created a Church founded on the lines laid down in Apostolic times. Unfettered by theory, and unhampered by plan, he did the day's work and provided for its needs. The result shows that he was guided by the spirit of God. He formed a Church after the Pentecostal pattern, a Church that existed to accomplish a moral and spiritual purpose; a Church that, having recovered the meaning of the New Covenant, witnessed to the world that it is through the forgiveness of sins that men pass into the light and gladness of the kingdom of heaven.⁴⁷

Dr. Simon is correct in affirming that Wesley's single objective was to create the New Testament community. There is no doubt that Wesley used the principle of adaptation although not to the extent Dr. Simon believed at the time he wrote this book. Wesley would have insisted that, even when he adapted, he was governed by fundamental New Testament principles and that any seeming adaptation was an application to use only within already acknowledged particular

47. Simon, The Revival of Religion in England in the Eighteenth Century (New York), pp. 314-315.

laws of God. Thus, as a result of Wesley's living faith and principled action, the organization of Early Methodism came into existence. The succeeding chapter will study that organization in its several parts.

The objective for this chapter is to present first, a brief general outline of Wesley's organization as it existed just prior to his death. This will be followed by a chronological statement of the rise of the various parts of the organization up to 1740 when the organizational structure was practically complete. Second, each element of the Early Methodist Society will be set forth and the manner of its operation. Third, an attempt will be made to trace each part to its roots.

In the Introduction¹ the following was said about roots, "Two kinds of roots must be kept constantly in mind: those which result from experience in the lives of the founders and those roots which are in the nature of a borrowing from other religious systems. The two kinds of roots are frequently so interwoven that they cannot be separated."

In a Main Account of the People Called Methodists written to Vincent Foxcroft in 1748, in response to a request for an account of the whole society of the Methodists, Wesley wrote a reply in which he set out "not only their practice

1. . . Supra, p. 4.

CHAPTER III

WESLEY'S ORGANIZATION, ITS ROOTS AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT UP TO 1749

The objective for this chapter is to present first, a brief general outline of Wesley's organization as it existed just prior to his death. This will be followed by a chronological statement of the rise of the various parts of the organization up to 1749 when the organizational structure was practically complete. Second, each element of the Early Methodist Economy will be set forth and the manner of its operation. Third, an attempt will be made to trace each part to its roots.

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In A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists written to Vincent Perronet in 1748, in response to a request for an account of the whole economy of the Methodists, Wesley wrote a reply in which he set out "not only their practice

1. Supra, p. 4.

on every head, but likewise the reason whereon it is grounded, the occasion of every step they have taken, and the advantages reaped thereby."²

Needless to say this letter, which runs to nearly eight thousand words, is a most valuable historical document. Yet no student of Methodism would claim that it contains a complete historical account of the origins and early development of the movement. It does enable us, however, to see the rise of Methodism as Wesley saw it in 1748. It offers little help however in tracing the elements of the organization to their several roots.

Dr. Francis H. Tees, Pastor Emeritus, Old St. George's, Philadelphia, Librarian and Custodian, Philadelphia Conference Historical Society, distinguishes between the "Methodist Movement" and "several stages which have often been incorrectly identified as the movement itself. Organized Methodism, or the organization of Methodism, for instance, was a stage in the progress of the movement."³ This is a legitimate distinction. The stage in which the movement crystallized into an organization and the roots from which this organization sprang is the subject matter of this chapter.

2. JWL, II, 292.

3. Tees, Methodist Origins (Nashville: 1948), p. 11.

Outline of Wesley's Organization up to the Time of His Death

The organization of Methodism just prior to Wesley's death was briefly as follows. There were two elements which formed a general background to Early Methodism as a functioning religious system which must be kept in mind constantly if the Methodist economy is to be seen in its proper perspective. These were the Church of England, to which the religious societies were intended to be a supplement, and Wesley, as the authoritative and final head of the societies.

Early Methodism was a religious movement operating within the framework of a church and yet continually repudiated by and thrust out from that church. The fact, also, that Methodism evolved into a church by slow stages, that there is such a vast body of primary source material some of which appears to be contradictory, as well as the fact that Wesley remained at least a professing churchman, makes an understanding of the true situation somewhat difficult. Any true presentation must be set against the background of two factors, namely, the Church of England and what Wesley called his "power."

The Church of England was both a religious community and the Church of England-established-by-law with the King as its "supreme Governor." This distinction seemed to be significant for Wesley and may have affected some of his

major decisions. To grasp the social significance of a state church as accepted by an eighteenth-century High-churchman requires a mentality which is almost impossible for those who have known only the free tradition of the new world.

As stated earlier, the Church of England was organized according to the Elizabethan Settlement, and was episcopal and hierarchical in polity. The Thirty-nine Articles were, and still are, her creed. Wesley always claimed these as the creedal background of Methodism although he must have known that the standards of Methodism were his own interpretation of these Articles. The government of the church was set forth in the canons and rubrics although in an episcopal polity the person of the bishop overshadows the rules in the sense that he is the interpreter of them. This point enables us to understand why, in part at least, Wesley was so objectionable to Anglicanism. His offense, in this respect, was two-fold, firstly, he called the rules man-made; and secondly, he interpreted them according to his own understanding. This was a major offense because in an episcopal organization the hierarchy both make and interpret the rules. This is a fine point and may be overstated, yet it was on this point that the relations of the Church of England and Early Methodism frequently turned.

Wesley organized societies the function of which was to

supplement the life of the church. The whole structure of the church, its worship and ordinances, its ministry and its edifices were for the service of its members and equally for those members who "turned" Methodist. The Methodists retained their membership because they had been received by baptism and confirmation. They were also entitled as citizens to certain privileges from the state church. Methodism in the judgment of its founder was not a new denomination, but a movement within the Church of England and consequently he insisted upon the relationship of his society members to the church being carefully maintained in all points. The authorities of the Church of England never made a test of the issue, although they frequently refused to give communion to "Methodist" members.

The Wesleys were ordained priests of the Church of England and exercised the privileges of their office. Their claim was that they were acting lawfully as Churchmen but, perhaps extraordinarily; and that the name "Methodist" was merely a name given, and in no way, represented a departure from the Church. Their society members were "the people called Methodists."

Wesley preached on every possible occasion, robing himself, whether the service was in a church or in the open-air. No regulation stipulated that services should not be held out-of-doors. He worshipped at every opportunity in

the regular services of the Church, appointed Methodist services at other hours than the church services and "communicated on an average, once in every four or five days."⁴ In addition it ought to be added that Wesley's preachers and members were enjoined to continue in the Church. On the other hand to his own followers and to most of England Wesley was the leader of the Methodists.

The purpose of the above statement is to present Early Methodism against its correct background. Too often Early Methodism has been treated as though it had been a movement by itself and its debt to the mother church has not been sufficiently emphasized. Other writers have tended to lay too much stress on the indebtedness to the Church of England and on Wesley's High-Churchmanship. The correct perspective is to see an orderly religious movement working within an ecclesiastical system, not possessing all the features of a church yet developing till the character and essentials of a distinctive communion can no longer be denied.

The second element in the Early Methodist situation which must be continually borne in mind was the authoritative position in which Wesley stood as the head of the Methodist Societies. Wesley, a priest of the Church of England, was

4. John C. Bowmer, The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in Early Methodism, LQR, October, 1950.

the founder of Methodism and remained till his death the sole head. Administrative units came into being. Certain personnel having different titles but subject to Wesley, were entrusted with responsibility. Wesley himself remained the ultimate authority, not autocratic and power-loving as Southey and others have suggested but beneficent, gracious, understanding and tolerant, nevertheless, insistent upon the finality of his place as head of the Wesleyan Societies.

Wesley has left on record a statement of this "power" and its roots. It is necessary to include his statement in the context, long as it is, since Wesley's place as the head of the Societies is one of the main factors in an understanding of the organization. The person of Wesley and his "power" was the keystone to each characteristic feature of the organization. Too often in the study of Early Methodist organization this point has not been made clear.

In The Large Minutes (printed in 1791, the year of Wesley's death) in Q. 26, Wesley inquired, "What are the rules of a Helper?" to which he replied in twelve points. The last of the twelve insists upon their obedience to his direction. We quote number 12.

Act in all things, not according to your own will, but as a son in the Gospel. As such, it is your part to employ your time in the manner which we direct; partly, in preaching and visiting from house to house; partly, in reading, meditation, and prayer.

Above all, if you labour with us in our Lord's vineyard, it is needful that you should do that part of the work which we advise, at those times and places which we judge most for his glory.

This statement of the necessary submission of Helpers was related to the question of his authority (which had been challenged), so Q. 27 proceeds to deal with the matter of his "power."

Q. 27. What power is this which you exercise over both the Preachers and the societies?

A. Count Zinzendorf loved to keep all things close; I love to do all things openly. I will therefore tell you all I know of the matter, taking it from the very beginning.

(1.) In November, 1738, two or three persons who desired "to flee from the wrath to come," and then a few more, came to me in London, and desired me to advise and pray with them. I said, "If you will meet me on Thursday night, I will help you as well as I can." More and more then desired to meet with them, till they were increased to many hundreds. The case was afterwards the same at Bristol, Kingswood, Newcastle, and many other parts of England, Scotland, and Ireland. It may be observed, the desire was on their part, not mine. My desire was, to live and die in retirement. But I did not see that I could refuse them my help, and be guiltless before God.

Here commenced my power; namely, a power to appoint when, and where, and how they should meet; and to remove those whose lives showed that they had not a desire "to flee from the wrath to come." And this power remained the same, whether the people meeting together were twelve, or twelve hundred, or twelve thousand.

(2.) In a few days some of them said, "Sir, we will not sit under you for nothing; we will subscribe quarterly." I said, "I

will have nothing; for I want nothing. My Fellowship supplies me with all I want." One replied, "Nay, but you want a hundred and fifteen pounds to pay for the lease of the Foundery; and likewise a large sum of money to put it into repair." On this consideration, I suffered them to subscribe. And when the society met, I asked, "Who will take the trouble of receiving this money, and paying it where it is needful?" One said, "I will do it, and keep the account for you." So here was the first Steward. Afterwards, I desired one or two more to help me, as Stewards, and, in process of time, a greater number.

Let it be remarked, it was I myself, not the people, who chose these Stewards, and appointed to each the distinct work wherein he was to help me, as long as I desired. And herein I began to exercise another sort of power; namely, that of appointing and removing Stewards.

(3.) After a time a young man, named Thomas Maxfield, came and desired to help me as a son in the gospel. Soon after came a second, Thomas Richards; and then a third, Thomas Westell. These severally desired to serve me as sons, and to labour when and where I should direct. Observe: These likewise desired me, not I them. But I durst not refuse their assistance. And here commenced my power, to appoint each of these when, and where, and how to labour; that is, while he chose to continue with me. For each had a power to go away when he pleased; as I had also, to go away from them, or any of them, if I saw sufficient cause. The case continued the same when the number of Preachers increased. I had just the same power still, to appoint when, and where, and how each should help me; and to tell any, (if I saw cause,) "I do not desire your help any longer." On these terms, and no other, we joined at first: On these we continue joined. But they do me no favour in being directed by me. It is true, my "reward is with the Lord:" But at present I have nothing from it but

trouble and care; and often a burden I scarce know how to bear.

(4.) In 1744 I wrote to several Clergymen, and to all who served me as sons in the gospel, desiring them to meet me in London, and to give me their advice concerning the best method of carrying on the work of God. And when their number increased, so that it was not convenient to invite them all, for several years I wrote to those with whom I desired to confer, and they only met me at London, or elsewhere; till at length I gave a general permission, which I afterwards saw cause to retract.

Observe: I myself sent for these of my own free choice. And I sent for them to advise, not govern, me. Neither did I at any time divest myself of any part of the power above described, which the providence of God had cast upon me, without any design or choice of mine.

(5.) What is that power? It is a power of admitting into, or excluding from, the societies under my care; of choosing and removing Stewards; of receiving or not receiving Helpers; of appointing them when, where, and how to help me, and of desiring any of them to confer with me when I see good. And as it was merely in obedience to the providence of God, and for the good of the people, that I at first accepted this power, which I never sought; so it is on the same consideration, not for profit, honour, or pleasure, that I use it at this day.

(6.) But "several gentlemen are offended at your having so much power." I did not seek any part of it. But when it was come unawares, not daring to "bury that talent," I used it to the best of my judgment. Yet I never was fond of it. I always did, and do now, bear it as my burden;--the burden which God lays upon me, and therefore I dare not lay it down.

But if you can tell me any one, or any five men, to whom I may transfer this burden, who can and will do just what I do now, I will heartily thank both them and you.

(7.) But some of our Helpers say, "This is shackling free-born Englishmen"; and demand a free Conference, that is, a meeting of all the Preachers, wherein all things shall be determined by most votes. I answer, It is possible, after my death, something of this kind may take place; but not while I live. To me the Preachers have engaged themselves to submit, to serve me as sons in the gospel; but they are not thus engaged to any man or number of men besides. To me the people in general will submit; but they will not thus submit to any other.

It is nonsense, then, to call my using this power, "shackling free-born Englishmen." None needs to submit to it unless he will; so that there is no shackling in this case. Every Preacher and every member may leave me when he pleases. But while he chooses to stay, it is on the same terms that he joined me at first.

"But this is making yourself a Pope." This carries no face of truth. The Pope affirms that every Christian must do all he bids, and believe all he says, under pain of damnation. I never affirmed anything that bears any the most distant resemblance to this. All I affirm is, the Preachers who choose to labour with me, choose to serve me as sons in the gospel. And the people who choose to be under my care, choose to be so on the same terms they were at first.

Therefore all talk of this kind is highly injurious to me, who bear the burden merely for your sake. And it is exceeding mischievous to the people, tending to confound their understanding, and to fill their hearts with evil surmisings and unkind tempers toward me; to whom they really owe more, for taking all this load upon me, for exercising this very power, for shackling myself in this manner, than for all my preaching put together: Because preaching twice or thrice a day is no burden to me at all; but the care of all

the Preachers and all the people is a burden indeed!⁵

Against the background of these two factors a brief outline of Early Methodism as an ecclesiastical organization will now be presented. The key to the movement, and later to the organization, was the religious society. Had the movement developed according to Wesley's first plan it would have consisted of a religious society as the vital nucleus of each parish within the Church of England. However, Wesley had to change his plan in order to serve and unite the emerging groups of awakened persons. Bands were introduced at the outset and later other select groups. Classes originated as the rapid increase in numbers made the societies unwieldy. Other services were adapted to meet emergent needs and to emulate the New Testament pattern.

The Wesleyan Societies were a Connexion. Webster defines connexionalism as "that form of church organization where scattered churches are held together by itinerant evangelists." Early Methodism in its first stage was a simple connexion in which John and Charles Wesley, a few ordained clergymen and Wesley's first preachers were the connexional link binding the societies. A second stage came about 1747-1749 with the emergence of a connexionalism bound

5. The Large Minutes, JWW, VIII, pp. 310-13.

together by an organizational structure operating on the basis of an official discipline through meetings which served as courts. This second type of connexionalism, which, ultimately became the structure of the Methodist Church, functioned through Wesley and Conference as the supreme authority and an intermediate structure which operated through the institutions of superintendent (assistant to Wesley), quarterly meeting and circuit. In addition to these, at the local level society, class and band had their own operational procedures.

The Conference which, usually, met annually from 1744 onwards, "in London or elsewhere," was the supreme court. In this meeting those who were "invited" by Wesley met to advise, not to "govern" him. The decisions of Conference were in reality Wesley's own opinions given an official standing. In 1784 the Conference was given legal definition as the governing body of Methodism to take effect after Wesley's death.

A Discipline or body of rules grew up and was incorporated into the Minutes of Conference on the basis of which the whole economy of Early Methodism was administered.

Property at first was held in Wesley's name but later when it was pointed out to him that the property which rightly belonged to the Methodist people would pass at his death to his personal heirs Wesley adopted a type of deed

which held property for the ownership of Methodism.

A body of preachers grew up under the "power" referred to above. They were chosen because they possessed certain New Testament qualifications. To them the highest tribute must be paid as spiritual, fearless and effective emissaries of the Gospel and in particular of the Methodist doctrine and discipline. The increase of Methodism in Wesley's lifetime to a membership well over one hundred and twenty thousand bears ample tribute to their effectiveness.

Wesley was unable to find that "one, or any five men, to whom I may transfer this burden" and as Fletcher of Madeley realized such a transfer would have been impossible in practice. At any rate the pressures within the Methodist community to become a self-governing communion, separate from the Church of England, became too great to be ignored or misunderstood so Wesley, in 1784, took the necessary steps to enable Methodism to become a church in its own right subsequent to his death.

The Chronological Development of the Organization

Up to 1749

It will further assist to present also a brief outline of the chronological development of the various organizational units of the Wesleyan societies up to 1749 at which date the organization was virtually complete.

Wesley tells us that Methodism had three beginnings.

In the Ecclesiastical History he writes,

The first rise of Methodism was in November, 1729, when four of us met together at Oxford; the second was in Savannah, in April, 1736, when twenty or thirty persons met at my home; the last was in London on this day May 1, 1738, when forty or fifty of us agreed to meet together every Wednesday evening, in order to have free conversation, begun and ended with singing and prayer.⁶

Dr. J. S. Wilder, Jr., however, points out that while these seemed to Wesley to be the beginnings of Methodism yet from the "present historical perspective" a number of other beginnings are discernible. He lists eight "beginnings of Methodism" as follows:

The Holy Club at Oxford in 1729, started by Charles and to which the term "Methodist" was first applied;
 The formation of the Savannah Society in April, 1736;
 The founding of the Fetter Lane Society, May 1, 1738;
 Wesley's evangelical conversion in Aldersgate, London, May 24, 1738;
 The building of the New Room in Bristol, May 9, 1739;
 The founding of the Kingswood School, May 15, 1739;
 The purchase of the Foundery, London, November, 1739;
 The organizing of the "First Methodist Society," latter end of 1739, in London.⁷

6. John Wesley, A Concise Ecclesiastical History, IV, 175.

7. Wilder, The Early Methodist Lay Preachers and Their Contribution to the Eighteenth Century Revival in England, pp. 56-62. Edin. Thesis.

In addition to the above, while not significant enough to be considered as beginnings, there were a number of events which helped to provide the background from which Methodism arose. Following Wesley's experience with the Holy Club at Oxford he went, in 1735, to Georgia with the intention of serving as a missionary to the Indians. Aboard the ship upon which he sailed was a group of Moravians and to them particularly was due his awakening to a consciousness of inner and spiritual religion. Thomas à Kempis had been the means of "awakening" Wesley in 1725, but here among the Moravians was inner spiritual power, with victory over fear and the bond of loving fellowship. During his whole stay in Georgia Wesley was in contact with the inner, experiential and spiritual religion of the Moravians. This was the more influential with Wesley because he believed the Moravians to be a true church in the apostolical succession.

A few points are worthy of note. Before sailing for Georgia, Wesley for the first time, had preached extempore in a church in London. In Georgia, he had listened to the Presbyterians make extemporary prayer, had joined with the Moravians in a love-feast and had formed a religious society in the church in Savannah. Upon his return to England he himself led in extemporary prayer at the castle at Oxford.

Wesley assisted in forming the Fetter Lane Society May 1, 1738, to which he refers as the third step in the rise

of Methodism. Peter Bohler, the Moravian, is mentioned in the Journal in this connection. The "rules for the foundation of the society are also given. Rule 2 specifies that the society shall be "divided into bands, or little companies, none of them consisting of fewer than five or more than ten persons."

On May 24th, Wesley experienced conversion at an Aldersgate Society meeting. Both of these societies were Church of England societies but under strong Moravian influence. Following his conversion Wesley proceeded to Germany to study Moravianism at first hand. Upon his return to London on September 16th, he gave himself to the work of the religious societies in London and Oxford as well as to preaching where opportunity offered.

On March 29th, Wesley left for Bristol at the invitation of Whitefield. Upon his arrival there he led the great development of the Wesleyan societies which took place at Bristol.⁸

8. We quote a footnote in Dr. Wilder's thesis (op. cit., p. 123 n.) which deals with the nature of the Bristol societies: "Some will say that the Societies meeting in the New Room in Bristol were the first truly Methodist societies. But following the lead of both Curnock and Simon, it must be maintained that these societies were still primarily Religious Societies within the Establishment. When, however, in the history of the Bristol societies they ceased to be Religious Societies and became Methodist (as

The first mention of Philip Henry Molther⁹ in the Journal appears on November 1, 1739. With the arrival of Molther in London the "stillness" controversy began which culminated in the separation of Wesley and a number of followers to form what became the Foundery Society. The date of the purchase of the property to become known as the Foundery, the London home of Early Methodism, is not precisely known but a note by Dr. Curnock in the Journal¹⁰ suggests November 1739. The formation of the United Societies is recorded as "the latter end of 1739" which is commonly accepted as the

they assuredly did) is almost impossible to ascertain with absolute assurance. In June of 1739 they were considered Methodist because John Cennick in his Account of the awakenings at Bristol.... (WHS Proceedings VI, pp. 101 ff) on June 12th he says, 'That evening we visited a society in Baldwin Street of religious young Churchmen who, in a little time afterwards, wholly mingled with the Methodists.' (P. 106) It can be said dogmatically that by 1743 when Wesley drew up the rules of the United Societies and they were adopted by the Bristol Societies then in fellowship with him, they were definitely Methodist. But, certainly, in name and spirit they were Methodist long before that--probably soon after the formation of the Foundery Society. There might be real justification in saying that the early Kingswood Religious Society was a new departure since there was no religious society there before; but because of the Calvinistic turn it soon took, it is evident that somewhat like the Fetter Lane Society, it did not follow through as truly Methodist until a later crisis caused a split in the group."

9. JWWJ, II, 312.

10. Ibid., 316 n.

beginning of Methodism.

Thus by the end of 1739 the United Societies existed, also societies in Bristol, Kingswood and Bath, all of which may be considered as Wesleyan societies. Bands were in use in all of these societies. The societies and bands existed and operated on "rules" which, we may assume were virtually the same as those of the Fetter Lane Society. The love-feast was in use. The Foundery had been acquired, the New Room at Bristol was in process of construction, and the Kingswood School was in operation. Open-air preaching had commenced and was the means of great numbers being added to the societies. Some use was being made of lay workers although the order of Methodist preachers had not commenced. Already extension of the societies and the principle upon which this operated was in its initial existence. Wesley implies that the appointment of the first steward came at the end of 1738 or early in 1739.¹¹ However, there is some reason to think this came somewhat later, possibly in 1740 or 1741 as the first reference to stewards in the Journal is in the Diary under the date of February 28, 1741.¹² In addition to the above, Wesley had published his first work which was a small volume of hymns. Thus as early as the end of 1739 not only had

11. JWW, VIII, 311.

12. JWJ, II, 430.

Methodism come into being with the formation of the United Societies, but much of the Methodist economy was in existence, at least, in its initial stage.

The year 1740 brought the final separation from the Moravians, the consequences of which are discussed in the next chapter, also watchnight services were first held in this year.

The year 1741 saw the separation from the Calvinists, which separation served the purpose of clarifying for Methodism its distinctive doctrine. In the same connection the first major act of Methodist discipline was enforced and the principle of Methodist discipline established.¹³ Wesley had now in the early months of 1741 brought into existence a distinctive type of religious society, clearly distinguished from the Church of England and Moravian types, with a clear-cut theology, Arminian as against Calvinist, and many of the characteristic features of Methodism. It was following this separation that "tickets" began to be used. Also in 1741, the societies officially recognized their responsibility for the care of the poor.¹⁴

The year 1742 was outstanding in the history of Methodist organization. The important event in that year was the

13. JWJ, II, p. 429; pp. 432-3.

14. JWJ, II, p. 453.

organization of classes, and, of course the accompanying office of class leader, both of which played a most fruitful part in the development of Methodism. The quarterly visitation of the classes soon became an accepted part of Methodism's economy.

By February 1742 the functioning of the Wesleyan Societies as a simple connexion was virtually complete. Had anyone inquired of Wesley at that time as to the nature of his objective he would no doubt have replied that nothing further was necessary in organization. There remained only the task of winning the clergy and forming a religious society in every parish in England. The work in Newcastle commenced in 1742 but it is significant mainly for extension, as it did not add anything to organization. The year 1743 did not contribute any new organizational features.

The year 1744 marks a significant addition for on June 25th, Wesley met with six clergymen of the Church of England and four lay preachers at the Foundery in London in a conference. This was the first Methodist Conference and became almost immediately a significant feature of the Methodist economy. This first conference considered and confirmed by setting down in writing all that had come into existence so far in the Wesleyan structure. Conferences were held annually and those of 1744, 1745, 1746 and 1747 gave serious study to doctrine, polity and discipline. So Conference and Minutes

of Conference were added to the characteristic features of the rapidly emerging ecclesiastical system.

One feature remained to be added. During the years 1746 to 1749 the second stage of Early Methodist organization came into being. This was the organization of an intermediate structure between the Conference level and the local level. This represented a development from the simple connexionalism which characterized the first stage and the connexional structure typical of later Methodism. This new structure was a contribution to eighteenth century ecclesiastical organization. It consisted of circuits, the monthly plan and the use of assistants, who were "helpers" to Wesley in that they gave oversight to the work in a certain territory. Circuits appear in the Minutes for the first time in 1746, the first mention of the monthly plan is in 1754, while the term "assistants," later changed to "superintendents," appears in the record of the first Quarterly Meeting which was held in 1748.

Other non-essential features of Methodist organization developed through the years. In 1752 the sustentation of preachers was adopted and followed a long development. Methodism was missionary from the beginning and continued so although it was not till after Wesley's death that the regular formation of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society took place. It is evident however that the essential elements of John Wesley's organization were in operation within a decade

from the rise of the United Societies. It is our task now to present these elements and in as far as is possible to trace them to their roots.

Part I: The Religious Society, its Origin, Nature
and Relation to the Church

The first Conference (1744) set before itself the objective of searching all matters to their foundations. This was characteristic of Wesley. Few men have been better qualified by both training and temperament to examine the very roots of the Christian Church. Throughout his lifetime he continued to search the foundations. In one respect he made a marked contribution, as has been shown in Chapter I, for just at the moment when the new denominational lines had crystallized, each one claiming Scriptural authority or at least Scripture and tradition, Wesley proceeded to explore all again at its roots and to publish abroad his findings. He also allowed a new type of ecclesiastical community to come into existence to challenge all existing systems to re-think their accepted foundations. The Minutes of the Conferences of 1744-1747 provide an excellent discipline for anyone who is prepared to examine the doctrine of the church with an open mind.

The Religious Society is the key to the development which took place under Wesley and which ultimately became Methodism.

Dr. Curnock tells in a note¹⁵ that the First Oxford Diary records that Wesley "heard Dr. Holdsworth on the authority of the church as a Society." The period covered by this Diary is roughly the years 1721 to 1727. Thus in his early twenties when Wesley was a student at Oxford a seed was sown in his mind as to the "religious society" character of the church. It made sufficient impression that young Wesley recorded it in his Diary. Those concerned to trace the earliest beginning of Methodism ought to pay more attention to this Diary item. As Wesley continued his work each succeeding experience seemed to stir his consciousness more deeply in this matter of the religious society aspect of the church.

The relationship of the church and a religious society cannot be dogmatically stated. No statement of the doctrine of the church has been universally acceptable. Christendom is still divided as to the "essential" nature of the church. The controversy turns upon the question whether the true essence of the church is visible or invisible or a relationship of the two; whether the church is an organism or an organization and how these are related; whether the church is catholic and universal or whether it is "gathered"; whether Christ abides in His church and the manner of His abiding; whether gifts or orders are primary. The Ecumenical Conference at

15. JWJ, I, p. 98n.

Amsterdam (1948) set itself the task of discovering those things which Christendom holds in common and those things which divide, and to report the same, but was not able to do more. Wesley stood at the moment in history when these differences had but recently taken on fixed patterns. He felt called to transcend controversy and to create a fully-rounded Scriptural church, rooted in spirituality with its structure organized to serve spiritual ends.

Nor can the difference between a church and a religious society be stated in any generally acceptable manner. All would not agree that there is a difference. However, in general, those bodies which have ecclesiastical organization, follow a prescribed mode of worship, maintain an ordained ministry and administer the sacraments are commonly known as churches; while those which stress fellowship, denying or minimizing the significance of organization, which do not ordain a regular ministry or administer the sacraments are known as religious societies. The Church of England, for example, is known as a church, while the Society of Friends, by their own designation declare themselves to be a religious society (although in this they are declaring their own doctrine of the church).

Dissenters were labelled nonconformists because they did not conform to the Established Church, but in this they were not making any admission that they were not the true,

Scriptural church. The Toleration Act, when it came, represented a national judgment upon the doctrine of the church which was a virtual denial of the exclusive conception of the doctrine of the church held by the Church of England and an admission of the failure of the use of force in matters of conscience. Wesley refused to be classed a Dissenter, except under necessity. Technically he was not although to superficial observers he appeared to be. He stated the difference as follows:

We are not Seceders--the Seceders laid the foundation of their work in judging others--We--in judging and condemning ourselves. They begin everywhere, with showing their hearers, how fallen the Church and the Ministers are, We, by showing our hearers how fallen they are themselves.¹⁶

Zarek says, "The church makes of the faithful a body under authority the sect makes of them a brotherhood."¹⁷ This is not completely true because nothing can be more authoritarian than a sect but it does state the distinction which the religious movements of the inner life, under Fox in the seventeenth and Wesley in the eighteenth century, were striving to achieve.

Wesley was satisfied that in creating religious societies he was not creating a new church. He makes the following

16. Minutes of the Methodist Conferences (1812 edition; 1766), p. 57.

17. Zarek, The Quakers, p. 31.

distinction. The Large Minutes define his objective.

Q. 3. What may we reasonably believe to be God's design in raising up the Preachers called Methodists?

A. Not to form any new sect; but to reform the nation, particularly the Church; and to spread scriptural holiness over the land.¹⁸

It had been charged that the Methodist services were "public worship." His reply was as follows:

Yes, in a sense, but not such as supercedes the Church service. We never designed it should we have a hundred times professed the contrary....If it were designed to be instead of church service it would be essentially defective. For it seldom has the four grand parts of public praise; deprecation, petition, intercession and thanksgiving.¹⁹

Wesley also insisted that Methodists go to the parish church for the Sacraments. In writing to Walker of Truro he claimed spiritual effectiveness for his preachers but made it clear that they were not a regular ecclesiastical ministry. Wesley's major problem in later years was to find how that which was not a church could become a church. He bridged this gulf by claiming himself to be a New Testament "presbyter," and associating other presbyters with him, ordained certain men to "administer the sacraments," thus providing

18. JWW, VIII, p. 299.

19. Minutes of the Methodist Conferences (1812 edition; 1766), p. 58.

the two elements lacking in Methodist organization to form a church, namely an ordained ministry and the administration of the sacraments.

The term "society" was in common use at the time to describe any group of people who came together for any mutual purpose. However, the term "religious society" had long had a significance of its own. Religious societies had existed in the Church of Rome throughout the centuries but always within the authority of the church. Protestant religious societies were an inevitable result of the Reformation. For when the "Imperial" church had been challenged and the authority declared to be in the Word and the Spirit and every believer his own priest before God, then all manifestations of the church from the Roman to the Anabaptist became inevitable. Furthermore the succession of religious societies which appeared under many different names, from the Reformation to Methodism sprung from one source only and are essentially the same, which source is the New Testament church conceived as the mystical body of Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

The origin of religious societies in England is not known. When further evidence becomes available it is likely that they will be found to have been a product of the religious life of the Commonwealth period. The religious life of this period was characterized by a disorganization of the traditional

form and experimentation along new lines resulting largely from the giving of the English Bible in the common tongue with small companies reading and trying to understand and interpret the new truths revealed through this medium. Barclay in his valuable work The Inner Life of the Religious Societies of the Commonwealth (1879) described the character of the religious life of the period and attempted to indicate a sustained connection between the religious societies from the Commonwealth to Methodism but was not able to provide sufficient evidence to prove his case. He had to content himself with observing likenesses and parallels.

Following the Commonwealth, the Uniformity and Conventicle Acts while enacted to suppress these informal and nonconforming religious tendencies, served rather to promote and intensify them. The services of the Baptists and other nonconforming bodies often took the form of small religious society meetings. The Quakers were the first religious body to claim that the New Testament church was inward and of the religious society character and to deny the external and organized church. Barclay claims that the country was honeycombed with small religious society meetings sympathetic with the Quaker teachings. This could not but leave a legacy in the minds of those who had been influenced and many of these were still alive in the early eighteenth century.

The General Baptists brought Anabaptist conceptions from

the Continent. It is not known how extensive their influence was. However, it is known that George Fox had contact with them and was influenced by them prior to his founding of Quakerism.²⁰

There were religious societies in England within the Church of England before Wesley's time. The father of the Wesleys freely admits to having belonged to such a society. It is an interesting conjecture whether the occasion of meeting and the medium which influenced the decision of Samuel Wesley and Susanna Annesley to forsake the nonconformity of their fathers and enter the Church of England may not have been these same religious societies of the Church of England. Certainly it was some element in the life of the church more dynamic than its routine ecclesiasticism. The fact that the father admitted to having belonged to a religious society in his young manhood and the further fact that the mother so readily developed a religious society in the Epworth kitchen might well indicate something of their earlier associations. Dr. Simon says, "In the reign of Anne the Societies greatly prospered."²¹ Dr. Simon, who treats of this matter extensively in his work John Wesley and the Religious Societies establishes

20. A. Mitchell Hunter, "Conventicle," Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, ed. James Hastings, Vol. IV (1911).

21. Simon, John Wesley and the Religious Societies (London: 1921), p. 18.

the connection between Dr. Woodward's societies and the influence upon the Holy Club and upon Wesley in particular of his small volume, The Country Parson's Advice to his Parishioners. This, however, is the extent of the evidence that he is able to establish for the roots of the religious societies which influenced Wesley. There is nothing in Dr. Woodward's volume as to the origin of the societies which he founded. Noting the date, however, one cannot escape observing that it was the time of the high point of the Quaker influence in England. This in itself does not prove anything, but is an interesting observation.

Barclay gives a quotation quoted in Dr. Waddington's "Congregational History," first edition, p. 615, which is very significant.

In 1681, certain members of the laity of the Church of England published the following circular:--"We find that divers and several of those people called Quakers are also very good Christians, and preach true doctrine according to Holy Scripture; and we therefore declare that it is our opinion that such a voluntary ministry, to preach on free cost as aforesaid, is of excellent use and exceeding necessary to be allowed in the Church of England, not only in preaching to poor people in tabernacles, who cannot pay anything sufficiently to maintain a ministry, nor yet get pews in their parish churches, but also it makes the learned clergy to be the more sober and studious in their places, and therefore we can think of no other but that such voluntary ministers are sent of God; for we remember the Apostles were working men, of several trades as these are, yet we do not believe God sent these

to hinder the clergy of maintenance, but only to season them as salt seasons meat. In great parishes there is need to be at least two congregations; the parish church for the orthodox minister and the rich, and a tabernacle for the lay prophets and the poor."²²

The point of this quotation is the influence of the Quakers and their religious practices upon the laity of the Church of England. It is a strong possibility that ample evidence will yet become available to prove that the religious societies of the Church of England were a direct result of Quaker influence. Dr. Simon does not attempt to connect the religious societies of the Church of England with the Quaker societies. This is a task in itself. Barclay has a strong feeling of a connection running through the religious societies from the Commonwealth to Methodism. In his Introduction he says, "One of his objects has been to exhibit this Society (The Society of Friends) as one of the links in the chain of experiments in church organization which were made at the period of its rise (Commonwealth)."²³ Another related point needs attention for in the writing of English religious history there has not yet been an adequate estimate of the exceedingly profound influence of Quaker thought and practices upon English life in those decades when its power was at its

22. Barclay, op. cit., p. 531.

23. Ibid., p. xxx.

peak (roughly 1670-1680).

In the year 1671 Dr. Anthony Horneck, an English clergyman at Savoy, organized a group of young men into a "society" for the promotion of religion and piety. By 1678 (Dr. Woodward's time) such societies had been accepted within the Anglican Church.²⁴ In 1692 "The Society for the Reformation of Manners" was organized, in part, at least as a result of these Anglican societies. In 1698 "The Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge" was organized in which both the Wesleys and Whitefield were active. "The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts" was established in 1701 under which Wesley went as a missionary to the Indians in Georgia in 1735. We can accept Dr. Simon's conclusion that so far as the evidence is available the root of the Wesleyan religious societies can be traced to the religious societies of the Church of England in the previous century and in particular to the Horneck Societies. The succession then is the Horneck and Woodward societies, the Holy Club, the Church of England Societies and in particular the Fetter Lane Society which led directly to Wesley's "United Societies" in 1739. Thus the root and central core of Early Methodism was the religious society concept of the Christian Church which for nearly two centuries, in one form or another, and

24. Ibid., p. 10.

under various names, had provided a means of expression for the more spiritual and dynamic line of English religious life.

Religious Societies Contemporary with Early Methodism

There was a background of religious society organization both within the Church of England and apart from it. There were also other religious society communities contemporary with and associated with the rise of Methodism.

The Society of Friends had been in existence since 1648 and continued to carry on its distinctive work. This body and its relation to Early Methodism will be considered at length in the following chapter.

The eighteenth century Evangelical Revival included other movements than Wesleyan Methodism, some of which had their own distinctive origins prior to the work of the Wesleys, others were associated in their origin and parted company, but all contributed to the Revival.

The Welsh Calvinistic Methodists originated from the work of Rev. Griffith Jones (1684-1761) and Howell Harris (1714-1773), a converted layman, who became a fiery itinerant, setting up religious societies on the lines recommended in Josiah Woodward's little book. Wesley, who was still prejudiced against lay preachers, met Howell Harris in Bristol on June 18th, 1739 and they were mutually drawn to one another because

of the spirit they were of.²⁵ The Welsh societies developed along lines similar to the Wesleyan societies, forming a Conference in January 1743, that is, eighteen months before Wesley's first conference. In theology their emphasis was Calvinistic and consequently their association with Whitefield was closer than with the Wesleys. However, Wesley and Harris held each other in high regard, continued in warm friendship, in spite of differences, and mutually associated themselves with each other's societies. There is no reason to think, however, that Wesley's organization was influenced by Harris' work.

The Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion was the wing of the Evangelical Revival formed by the association of Whitefield and the Countess of Huntingdon, Selina Shirley (1707-1791). This work consisted mainly of the establishing of a number of chapels or preaching places effectively ministered to by evangelicals like Whitefield, Romaine, Venn and others. The emphasis was Calvinistic as opposed to Wesley's Arminianism and commenced with the separation of Whitefield from the Wesleys in Bristol in 1739. Lady Huntingdon became a convert of the Wesleys in London possibly in that year. The regular association with Whitefield commenced in 1748. The movement was a connexion but stressed preaching rather than religious

25. JWJ, II, pp. 223-4.

society fellowship. In spite of differences their aim was religious revival in the parishes of the Church of England and Wesley preached Whitefield's funeral sermon. Both the Calvinistic Methodists and Lady Huntingdon's Connexion were forced out of the Church of England. The contribution of Whitefield to Early Methodism consisted in the negative sense that the Calvinistic emphasis forced Wesley to a clear-cut Arminian position and therefore forced Early Methodism to clarify its distinctive doctrine. The continuation of the Calvinistic Controversy by all who took part rendered a marked service to Wesleyanism by defining unmistakably the association of Wesley's societies and the doctrines of free grace and universal redemption, which have proved themselves to be the real ground of Methodism and the root of its Christian dynamic.

Moravianism influenced Wesley and the form which his organization took more than any other single movement. Moravianism gave to Early Methodism some of its characteristic elements while it contributed in a negative sense also by warning Wesley to reject certain features which were obstacles to a creative and expanding Christianity.

The roots of the Moravian Church or, as it is called the Moravian Brethren, are to be found in Bohemia and in the work of John Hus. As a result of Hus's teaching societies were formed in Bohemia and Moravia independent of the Roman Church.

In 1467 and at later Synods the Moravians broke with Rome and, having secured the consecration of their own bishop, formulated the distinctive tenets of their Church, which were mainly along the lines later followed by the Reformation. Their stress, however, was on conduct rather than theology or polity; their organization was mainly presbyterian. They instituted a system of discipline and divided their members into three classes: the Perfect, the Proficient and the Beginners.

The outbreak of the Thirty Years' War (1618) almost wiped their church out of existence. However, their bishop John Comenius (1592-1672) gave oversight. As many of the members were of German origin Christian David, a carpenter, led those who would go with him into Saxony, where they settled with the permission of Count Zinzendorf on his estate at Herrnhut (1772).

Zinzendorf (1700-1760) was a Lutheran, a Pietist and a follower of Spener. He endeavoured to establish the Moravian community within the Lutheran Church. However, in 1727 at a Communion service the community experienced such a spiritual renewing that they decided to revive the ancient Moravian Church. Their chief characteristic henceforth was their intensive community organization for religious purposes. To Christendom, however, they have also been known for their missionary zeal, being the first Christian church to accept

the duty of evangelizing the heathen as the regular responsibility of the church.

Zinzendorf's conception of the Moravian Church was that of a religious community within Lutheranism, an "ecclesiola in Ecclesia," the work of which consisted in seeking to evangelize the Lutheran state church. Persecution broke out and a band of emigrants was sent to Georgia for whose care David Nitschmann was consecrated bishop. Later Zinzendorf himself was forced to leave Saxony. He was consecrated a bishop and travelled extensively furthering the missionary and colonizing activities of his Church. In 1742 the Prussian government recognized the Moravian body as a denomination. In 1749 Zinzendorf was recalled from banishment and the church was recognized as a portion of the Saxon state church. Also in 1749 the English Parliament recognized Moravianism as "an ancient Protestant Episcopal Church."

Wesley sailed to Georgia on the same ship with some of the Moravian emigrants in 1735 and saw vital, spiritual Christianity at work for the first time in his life. He was challenged to a living, personal faith. While he remained in Georgia he learned by his own experiences, by the study of the early church and through fellowship with the Moravian Community, all of which contributed later to the form which Methodism took. On his return to London he met Peter Bohler, a Moravian, who was on his way to North Carolina. Through

Bohler's instrumentality both Charles and John Wesley experienced conversion and John Wesley went to Germany to acquaint himself with the Moravian Church at first hand. Wesley found an intensive, religious-society-type of church under the leadership of Zinzendorf (still a layman) and with a lay ministry. The chief objective of Moravianism was the cultivation of the inner Christian life and for this purpose the congregation was divided into bands, men and women, married and single, old and young, meeting separately, under a leader. Wesley's impression, at first highly enthusiastic, was later modified.

Upon his return from Germany the Wesleys and others assisted Peter Bohler in forming the Fetter Lane Society (1738) for which they also drew up a set of Rules and organized Bands after the manner of the Moravian Church. In 1740 Wesley, having recently organized the Foundery Society, withdrew from the Fetter Lane Society taking with him those who believed as he did. The reason for the separation was that the Fetter Lane Society, although in theory a Church of England society, was under the "quietest" influence of a Moravian by the name of Molther. This doctrine was an enthusiasm of Molther himself and not the teaching of Moravianism.

There were other religious movements, such as a religious revival in Scotland and while it had no influence on the rise of Methodism yet it added to the total picture of what was

taking place in the British Isles. Methodism itself, after 1747 found a fruitful field in Ireland. Irish Methodism however did not contribute anything to the developing organization but was merely an early extension of what had already taken form in Bristol and London.

Thus we see that the Wesleyan societies were not an isolated phenomenon but a continuation of earlier societies and developed their distinctive characteristics in a setting of religious revival surrounded by movements which aimed at the cultivation of the spiritual life and which, by their existence, compelled the Methodists to shape both their beliefs and their structure on increasingly distinctive lines. In this way they made a contribution to the form finally taken by the Wesleyan societies. Thus throughout the decades of the eighteenth century from 1739 onwards, Wesley had to steer the course of Early Methodism, striving to keep its place within the framework of the Church of England, using its ordinances but isolated from it; surrounded by religious society movements like the Quakers, the Moravians, the Calvinistic Methodists and Lady Huntingdon's Connexion; often intermingling both leaders and society members, yet constantly having to clarify its essential beliefs and practices, so that the least intelligent could grasp them; choosing to limit its field to the lowest one-third of the population and therefore without influence or prestige.

Several brief quotations from a book written much closer to the time, a book which has no claim to scholarship but is rather a document in itself, will serve to give the atmosphere in which the Wesleys worked. Benham in the Memoirs of James Hutton, writing of the Moravians in 1742 says,

The undertakings of the brethren in this year were:--First, preaching in and about the city, after the example of the Methodists but combined as much as possible with the spiritual care of individual souls and the establishment of Bands or small societies; secondly, the organization of a Boarding School at Broad Oaks in Essex, called Lamb's Inn, and intended chiefly for the children of members of the London society....Dr. Spangenberg on the 27th gave an account of his having visited the society bands, announced the intention of receiving persons into the congregation in Fetter Lane, also of settling a little church at the same hour and place....., stated that there was no objection against the Brethren receiving into their congregation any one who was willing to abide a member of the church of England....On the 29th (November 1742) Dr. Hutton was received, and the Brethren and sisters who had heretofore mainly constituted his Fetter Lane Society, were now, under the advice of Count Zinzendorf, formed into a congregation of the Unity of the Brethren, they considering themselves not as exclusively Moravians, but as a society in the Church of England in union with the Brethren (reference in Benham T. Crantz's History P. 271. 3).²⁶

The Wesleys, Whitefield, Howell Harris and their preachers frequently visited one another's societies, as well as those

89. 26. Benham, Memoirs of James Hutton (London: 1856), p.

of the Moravians. When controversy did not rage it would have been difficult for a stranger to say, either by observing the leader or the conduct of the meeting, just which society he was attending.

The relationship of cooperation and rivalry is evidenced by Benham when he says, "the proper sphere of the labours of the Brethren in England, according to the SYNODICAL resolution of 1741, was to be, not in London, but in Yorkshire, in the footsteps of the Methodists, and in the field where Mr. Ingham had hitherto been active."²⁷ It is also interesting that the term used for the meeting of Spangenberg and his workers in London in 1741 was "Conference."

The love-feast was used by the Moravians. Benham, quoting a letter of George Marshall, says "after the German meeting was a love-feast, to thank God for all his blessings etc."²⁸ The language of this letter is strongly reminiscent of the language of the letters of the Quakers. Benham says again,

Whitefield at this (Hutton's refusal to print a reply to Wesley's sermon on universal redemption), took offense against the Brethren as well as against Wesley, and thus, the Methodists not only quarrelled with the Brethren but wrangled among themselves. By which means under the wise Providence of God, three different parties were formed in England. The one to consist of his witnesses; the second, delivered

27. Ibid., p. 110.

28. Ibid., p. 108.

from the formalism of the high church, was to preach the doctrine of free grace, whilst the third was to be gathered from among Churchmen and dissenters. The one He consigned to the Brethren, the second to John Wesley, and the third to Whitefield, and among all three he possesses a blessed heritage of his own.²⁹

The case of John Whitehead, Wesley's friend and biographer, is an illustration of how closely the streams of these society movements flowed one to another. Whitehead's parents left the Dissenters to join the Moravians in 1738. John Whitehead, early in life, became connected with the Methodists. He served as a lay preacher at Bristol. He then became a Quaker and a speaker for them. The Quakers assisted him in the study of medicine and he became the Wesleys' medical advisor. In 1784, he left the Quakers and again became a Methodist. He would have given up his profession and become a full-time preacher if Wesley had given him ordination. Wesley named Whitehead along with Coke and Moore as one of his literary executors.

The Development of the Religious Society within Wesley's own Experience to the Rise of the First Methodist Society

Wesley's first experience of anything in the nature of a religious society was in the Epworth Rectory when his

29. Ibid., p. 955.

mother, unwittingly or otherwise, had brought into being what her husband, Rev. Samuel Wesley, deemed to be a "conventicle." Both parents, it will be remembered, were of Dissenting parentage and knew the harshness of the Conventicle Act. While a young student at Oxford, Wesley noted in his Diary, as has already been mentioned, having heard Dr. Holdsworth speak on "the authority of the church as a society." The Holy Club at Oxford was Wesley's first mature experience of informal fellowship which partook of the nature of a religious society. The origin of the Holy Club is given as follows: "In November, 1729 John Wesley, Charles Wesley, William Morgan, a commoner of Christ Church, Robert Kirkham of Merton, began to meet together, and agreed to spend three or four evenings a week in reading the Latin and Greek Classics and especially the Greek Testament. In addition they determined to meet on Sunday evenings for the special consideration of Divinity."³⁰

The Holy Club later came to have a religious character and purpose with John Wesley as leader. His letter to Mr. Richard Morgan of Dublin, dated October 18th, 1732³¹ gives an account of its organization and purpose. Wesley learned much from being a member of the Holy Club. Simon suggests

30. Simon, John Wesley and the Religious Societies (London: 1921), p. 90.

31. JWJ, I, pp. 87-102.

that Woodward's A Country Parson's Advice to his Parishioners was one of their textbooks. We know that Wesley learned the value of intimate fellowship and group discipline.

The Holy Club fellowship and discipline were continued on board ship on the journey to Georgia. It was on board ship also that Wesley had his first experience of the Moravian Church which made the religious society principle central to its organization.

In Georgia, Wesley experimented with the idea of a religious society as the inner nucleus of a congregation. Earlier experiments had been made within a select circle of clergymen and intellectuals. In Georgia, Wesley organized his first society composed of men and women, educated and uneducated, old and young, as the spiritual core of a church community. Wesley later said in his City Road sermon, "after a time I desired the most serious of them to meet me once or twice a week at my home. Here were the rudiments of a Methodist Society." At the time he recorded in the Journal, (April, 1736),

Not finding, as yet, any door open for the pursuing of our main design, we considered in what manner we might be most useful to the little flock at Savannah. And we agreed,

1. To advise the more serious among them to form themselves into a sort of little society, and to meet once or twice a week in order to reprove, instruct and exhort one another.
2. To select out of these a smaller number for a more intimate union with each other, which might be forwarded partly by our

conversing with each other, and partly by inviting all together to our house; and this, accordingly we determined to do every Sunday in the afternoon.³²

The Georgia period provided Wesley with a wealth of experience in the nature, use and method of a religious society. The Moravians provided an example of a religious society community, welcoming Wesley to their meetings, attending Wesley's society meetings and giving him fellowship. The major matter concerning Wesley at this time was the actual character of the New Testament and Primitive church. Much of his reading in Georgia was to clarify his mind on this point. By the time he left Georgia to return to London he was satisfied that the church ought to include religious societies within its organization.

Between the return to England and the date of his conversion Wesley tells us in his Journal the kind of religious society which he conducted. "I....went in the evening to a society in Oxford, where, (as my manner then was at all societies), after using a collect or two and the Lord's Prayer, I expounded a chapter in the New Testament, and concluded with three or four more collects and a psalm." (March 26, 1738).³³

Dr. Curnock appends the following note to this entry in

32. JWJ, I, pp. 197-205.

33. Ibid., pp. 448-9.

the Journal.

In devotional "manner" these societies differed, it should be noted, from the untitled meetings held in Savannah and Frederica. The latter were held, as a rule, on Wednesday and Friday evenings, after evening prayers and exposition. Their characteristic features were singing, reading, and conversation. Hymns of an experimental character were used: the readings from Law, Kempis, Scougal, Halliburton were necessarily brief, and intended to incite conversation. The Sunday-afternoon meetings of the (still untitled) inner circle followed the same plan. The absence of "prayer" (until Wesley learnt the value of extempore prayer from the Presbyterian Highlanders of Darien) is not remarkable when we remember that the meetings immediately followed evening prayers. So also the absence of the Bible from the meetings is accounted for. The "religious societies" in London, Bristol, and here in Oxford, whether founded by Wesley, or, as in this case, founded by Wesley and his friends, must be carefully distinguished from those meetings of an earlier and later period in which fellowship and experience were the most prominent features. No doubt the "religious society" often merged into a Moravian or a Methodist society. But at first it was quite distinct.³⁴

This was the type of religious society which Wesley was conducting at this time. It was an auxiliary to the regular services of the church.

The Fetter Lane Society was founded by Wesley and others May 1, 1738. The rules (eleven in number) are given in the Journal in connection with the statement of its founding.³⁵

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid., p. 458.

This was another kind of religious society, its organization influenced by Peter Bohler and, although in theory a Church of England society, (the brothers Wesley being the clergymen for the necessary supervision), yet it partook more of the nature of the Moravian bands. Further, membership in the Church of England was no longer considered requisite for membership in the society. On May 21st and 24th respectively Charles and John Wesley experienced conversion; Charles at the home of James Hutton, John at a society in Aldersgate Street.

Wesley separated from the Fetter Lane Society, taking others with him in July, 1740. The problem which had arisen was that of authority. On the surface the debate was theological, on the question of "stillness," but Wesley saw clearly that the issue at stake was that of authority. The government of the society rested with the members and consequently debate and division resulted. Wesley learned this lesson well and in the Methodist societies he retained the final authority in all matters to himself, (with, of course, reference to the Scriptures and the wisdom which might be received from the Holy Spirit operating through the group).

The conclusions, then, at which Wesley had arrived at the time of his separation from the Fetter Lane Society and the organization of the first Methodist societies can be summarized as follows: 1. He was convinced that, Scripturally,

the religious society was of the essence of the New Testament Church, and conversely, that a church without the fellowship principle which the religious society provided was not a New Testament Church; 2. He believed that religious societies could exist as an "ecclesiola in Ecclesia"; 3. He believed that the religious society was necessary to produce and sustain mature Christian character and without the religious society the church had no provision for one of the most essential aspects of its work; 4. He believed that the authority for all matters within the life of a religious society should not rest with the members but in some person or persons (quite likely representative of the church) outside the society; 5. Finally, as a result of his experience with his newly-organized Foundery Society, he believed that the basis of membership should not consist in any opinion or membership in a church.

The Foundery Society, or "The United Society" was significant because it was based on these convictions. Dr. Simon writes,

When John Wesley determined that there should be only one condition previously required in those who desired admission into the new society, namely "a desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins" he took a step which separated him from the Religious Societies. From the time of Dr. Horneck it was essential that those who joined the old societies should be members of the Church of England. It is true the

Dissenters were occasionally allowed to attend meetings, but the conditions of such attendance were strict. Wesley keeping his eye steadfastly on the spiritual qualifications, declined to impose an ecclesiastical test on those who came to him earnestly longing for the salvation of their souls. He opened his new society not only to Churchmen, but to members of all other churches, and to those who were outside all religious organizations. He sought to help those who felt that they had only the form and not the power of godliness; and he joined them to his society "in order that they might pray together, receive the word of exhortation, and watch over one another in love."³⁶

Wesley, then, in his use of the religious society had arrived at something simple, unique, fundamental and Scriptural when in 1739 he rejected as the qualification for membership all conditions of an ecclesiastical and theological character and insisted upon one condition only and one which stressed life and godliness, "A desire to flee from the wrath to come, and be saved from their sins." Never did Wesley show his religious genius more clearly than in this simplification of all the issues involved, by which also he laid the foundation and released the power of Methodism at one stroke. He thus laid the foundation in the primary power of religion rather than in its secondary forms and theologies. His concern was to recapture the New Testament life which, being in the members first, would manifest itself in living

36. Simon, John Wesley and the Religious Societies, p. 21.

societies or religious communities.

Part II: The Meetings of Early Methodism

The Meetings of Early Methodism were Religious Society, Class Meeting and Band; other meetings were the Love-feast, the Watchnight and the annual Covenant service. These meetings were distinctively Wesleyan and were intended to supplement the regular services of the Church of England.

The sources from which Wesley derived the religious society and its development in his own experience have already been considered. In the "Plain Account" he wrote "Thus arose, without any design on either side, what was afterwards called a Society."³⁷ As has been seen there was a considerable historical background to the rise of the "United Societies." Speaking of them he wrote,

Upon reflection, I could not but observe, This is the very thing which was from the beginning of Christianity. In the earliest times those whom God had sent forth "preached the gospel to every creature." And the *olakpoatai*, "the body of hearers," were mostly either Jews or heathens. But as soon as any of these were so convinced of the truth as to forsake sin and seek the gospel salvation, they immediately joined them together, took an account of their names, advised them to watch over each

³⁷. JWL, II, p. 294. Apparently the term "United" was used because "They therefore united themselves 'in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they might help each other to work out their salvation.'"

other, and met these Katnxouuevoi "catechumens" (as they were then called) apart from the great congregation, that they might instruct, rebuke, exhort, and pray with them and for them according to their several necessities.³⁸

The Bands or band-societies came into Early Methodism from Moravianism through the London societies primarily through the Fetter Lane Society. The "United Society" was divided into "Bands," "Select Societies" and "Penitents." The Society consisted of all "awakened persons." Of these, those who "were supposed to have remission of sins" and "wanted some means of closer union" where they "could pour out their hearts without reserve," were gathered in Bands.

They were the more desirous of this when they observed it was the express advice of an inspired writer: "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed." In compliance with their desire, I divided them into smaller companies; putting the married or single men and married or single women together.³⁹

The "Select Societies" were

those who continued in the light of God's countenance....So I desired a small number of such as appeared to be in this state to spend an hour with me every Monday morning. My design was, not only to direct them how to press after perfecting, etc.,....but also to have a select company to whom I might unbosom myself on all occasions without reserve, etc.⁴⁰

38. JWL, II, pp. 294-5.

39. JWL, II, p. 301.

40. JWL, II, p. 304.

This quotation from the Plain Account indicates not only the nature of the Select Society, but the uses for which Wesley intended it. Wesley wanted to perpetuate the Holy Club fellowship, not only for the sake of the fellowship but because he believed it had value in testing his guidance. It must be remembered on how many intimate matters he had to render decisions. The Select Society cannot definitely be said to come from Moravianism although it was possibly Wesley's adaptation of the "Monitors." It would be correct to say (1) that the idea of various units came from the Moravian Church⁴¹ and (2) that the use of graded bands at this time arose from Wesley's conception of stages in Christian growth. Dr. Curnock's note in the Journal is,

The "bands" Wesley adopted, tentatively in Georgia, more fully in England. Many lists of bands in Wesley's handwriting are preserved in the Colman Collection. Invariably this Moravian plan is followed.⁴²

The "Penitents" were a logical unit for a graded system to adopt. They were known in the Primitive Church and possibly something of this kind was used in Moravianism. Wesley recorded that in spite of all the means of going on from faith to faith "some fell from the faith....I separated them from the rest, and desired them to meet me apart on Saturday

41. JWJ, II, p. 52.

42. JWJ, II, p. 53n.

evenings."⁴³ The use of this unit was effective "these soon recovered the ground they had lost. Yea, they rose higher than before."⁴⁴

The Class or Class-meeting was an institution which originated in the group-wisdom of Early Methodism and which Wesley quickly adapted to a central place in the Methodist economy. The origin of the Class, which Wesley says is simply the word "classis," is also recorded in the Plain Account. Larger numbers of people were seeking admission than the infant organization was able to care for with only society, bands and Wesley's personal supervision. He writes,

at length, while we were thinking of quite another thing, we struck upon a method for which we have cause to bless God ever since. I was talking with several of the Society in Bristol concerning the means of paying the debts there, when one stood up and said, "Let every member of the Society give a penny a week till all are paid." Another answered, "But many of them are poor, and cannot afford to do it." "Then," said he, "put eleven of the poorest with me; and if they can give anything, well: I will call on them weekly; and if they can give nothing, I will give for them as well as for myself. And each of you call on eleven of your neighbours weekly; receive what they give, and make up what is wanting." It was done. In a while, some of these informed me, they found such and such an one did not live as he ought. It struck me immediately, "This is the thing; the very thing we have wanted so long." I called together all the Leaders of the

43. JWL, II, p. 303.

44. Ibid.

classes (so we used to term them and their companies), and desired that each would make a particular inquiry into the behavior of those whom he saw weekly. They did so. Many disorderly walkers were detected. Some turned from the evil of their ways. Some were put away from us. Many saw it with fear, and rejoiced unto God with reverence.⁴⁵

The class which originated in Bristol was immediately used in London and elsewhere. Soon a development took place which was significant for the class members were called together weekly.

By this means a more full inquiry was made into the behaviour of every person.... Advice or reproof was given as need required, quarrels made up, misunderstandings removed; and after an hour or two spent in this labour of love, they concluded with prayer and thanksgiving.

To those who complained of this as an innovation Wesley replied, "Why we use them, you will readily understand, if you read over the Rules of the Society." He calls them "prudential helps" "not essential, not of divine institution." To those who objected there is no scripture for this he replied that Scripture gives general rules to be applied by common sense to particular situations. The class soon became the most characteristic meeting of Methodism. This was the very thing that had been needed. The fact is that it was the establishment of the new office of class leader even more than the class

45. JWL, II, p. 296.

itself (because society and band were in use) which met so great a need because it provided Wesley with a new order of helpers. The class came into being in February 1742.

Methodist society, class and band, which are of the very essence of Early Methodism, can be traced easily enough to their external roots. However something needs to be added as to the significance of these meetings and what their existence reveals of Wesley's consciousness and the selection and rejection which arose out of his convictions about the nature of the Christian church. The meetings of Early Methodism reveal Wesley's inner mind more than any of the other elements of Methodism.

What Wesley wanted was reasonably clear to him. He wanted a "fellowship of the forgiven" who would use "Method" for their growth to perfection in love, he wanted the Christian experience of free grace and the working out of that experience to New Testament maturity. However, Wesley had become deeply entangled in the pietistic stream. This complicated his own personal experience and the problem of setting up organized and experimental units for the nurture of the Christian life. It would seem that Charles, in contrast even in spite of his relapse into quietism, was really not deeply touched by the pietistic influence but was a churchman and evangelical.

The difference between class and band in Wesley's early

societies stood for something more than experimentation. It was also more than a problem of unwieldy numbers. It was a cleavage which had existed in the Continental Reformation, and had continued through evangelical and Anabaptist streams. The conflict arose between those whose experience resulted from free grace and those who sought soul-culture by mystical piety and discipline. Both are essential elements of New Testament experience but are seldom found in harmonious relationship. The controversy between Richard Baxter and the Quakers in the seventeenth century is a typical example. The problem seems to be the problem of guilt and the means by which the soul is absolved and sanctified. The Continental Reformers taught justification as an act of free grace while the Anabaptists took their stand on the subjective work of the Holy Spirit in the soul. The church for the Reformers was objective, while for the Anabaptists it was the community of the Inner Spirit. Within the Anabaptist movement there were great differences as to the manner in which this subjective work was to be carried out in the cleansing of the conscience but usually the Anabaptist community was an intensive religious nucleus seeking by mystical and often introspective means the creation of a community of the Spirit.

The Moravians had drawn upon both streams. Their evangelical witness and missionary activity represented the active

free grace tradition while their pietistic, mystical emphasis and the Herrnhut-Marienborn communities were of the Anabaptist type.

Wesley received both strains from his Moravian associations. His visit to the Moravians came almost immediately upon his experience of evangelical conversion and by nature he was already a "methodist." His first enthusiasm for the pietistic Herrnhut community was soon tempered by his objective mind. His letters show, however, that he was still dealing in superficial characteristics and not recognizing that these were frequently fundamentally conflicting elements of experience.

In London he became increasingly unwilling to place his converts under subjective and pietist influence. Molther's "stillness" campaign merely brought an issue to a specific focus.

The dividing line between the mystical, the pietist and the quietist is so fine that the inexperienced can pass innocently from one to the other. Wesley was clear about the mystical and the quietist but he was still emotionally involved in the pietist. It was his natural genius for external order, form, and organization that was warning him. Whether he clearly understood and consciously desired it or not he carried the pietist legacy over into Early Methodism. Wesley was safeguarded by his own aggressive spirit but is it not

possible that here we are at the root which took such a heavy toll in nervous disorders amongst the first race of Methodist preachers?⁴⁶

Wesley's objective was not only to save souls but to bring them on to Christian perfection. Was this a New Testament conception or was Wesley being led into a pietistic error? Wesley's Methodism was an attempt to provide, in addition to the ordinary means of grace--prayer, the Word and the Sacraments, a further means which by "fellowship" would nurture the soul. In other words, he was seeking what he believed to be the whole New Testament church.

One searches in vain for the pronouncements of leading Methodists or for the judgment of the Methodist Church upon this particular experiment in the Early Wesley societies, particularly on their founder's insistence upon mutual confession and especially upon his claim this was the mark of a mature Methodist. Even before Wesley's death Methodism was tending to stress the evangelical emphasis as against the pietistic. The class-meeting came to be exalted as the distinctive Methodist unit while the use of bands scarcely survived Wesley's lifetime. However, Wesley himself did not surrender them. On February 8th, 1791, he wrote to Thomas Roberts, "Constitute

46. The Large Minutes, JWJ, VIII, pp. 313-14.

bands in each large society."⁴⁷ The year before he had written to Thomas Rutherford with regard to Sister Cox, "she should immediately meet in a lively band."⁴⁸ The ultimate pronouncement of Methodism on this whole issue by the discontinuance of bands has been that the Founder was wrong.

The Class-meeting continued, and consisted of singing, prayer and Bible-reading, but its distinctive mark was testimony to the effective grace of God. Mutual confession and pietistic examination disappeared. Although in its turn again the class meeting has largely disappeared. Only occasionally and often in places far removed, little companies of Methodists still meet in class meetings where testimony is given.

In general, it is fair to say that the Methodist class has become almost identical with the Presbyterian elder's district and often shows no more vitality. Nothing could have happened which could more certainly make the Founder rise from the grave in wrath for if there was any spiritual deadness which he deplored it was that of the Presbyterian elder and his "district." Methodism has obeyed its Founder's injunction to action although only one of his commands. Unfortunately it has not gone on with the profound study of the soul, the means of its cultivation and the stages of its growth.

It is not necessary to dwell at length on the roots of

47. JWL, VIII, p. 261.

48. JWL, VIII, p. 197.

the Love-feast, the Watchnight and the annual Covenant service. The Love-feast is the New Testament Agapae.⁴⁹ It was used by the Moravians having been taken over by them from the Waldenses. Early Methodism got the Love-feast from the Moravians and the Fetter Lane Society.

Dr. Eayrs describes the Love-feast as follows:

A little plain cake and water, the elements of a simple meal, were distributed to all present and taken by them as members of one family united by love of Christ. This was followed by testimonies concerning His love to them and theirs to Him, interspersed with songs of praise. At first only members of the Bands were admitted to these gatherings. Later all members of society enjoyed this privilege, the quarterly ticket of membership being the passport. Other religious persons might receive the written permission of the preacher, and see and hear the miracles of divine grace.⁵⁰

The Watchnight Service was another of Early Methodism's original developments and provides an excellent example of the spontaneous development of Christian institutions which characterized Wesley's societies and his readiness to allow the free life of the societies to function. The statement of the rise, nature and use of the Watchnight is given by Wesley in the Plain Account.

About this time I was informed that several persons in Kingswood frequently met together

49. A. J. MacLean, "Agape," ERE ed. James Hastings, Vol. I (1908).

50. Eayrs, A New History of Methodism, Vol. I, p. 286.

at the school, and when they could spare the time spent the greater part of the night in prayer and praise and thanksgiving. Some advised me to put an end to this; but, upon weighing the thing thoroughly and comparing it with the practice of the ancient Christians, I could see no cause to forbid it. Rather I believed it might be made of more general use. So I sent them word I designed to watch with them on the Friday nearest the full moon, that we might have the light thither and back again....This we have continued to do once a month ever since in Bristol, London, and Newcastle, as well as Kingswood; and exceeding great are the blessings we have found therein:51

In addition to the above Wesley replied to John Bailey, Rector of Kilcully, Cork, June 8, 1750,

You charge me, fourthly, with holding "midnight assemblies"....Sir, did you never see the word "Vigil" in your Common Prayer Book? Do you know what it means? If not, permit me to tell you that it was customary with the ancient Christians to spend whole nights in prayer, and that these nights were termed Vigiliae, or Vigils.

The annual Covenant Service is especially interesting because it is the feature of Early Methodism which shows a debt to Dissent. Wesley himself was the one who introduced this institution into Methodism. His account of its origin and introduction is given in the Journal, "Wed. 6th August 1755."

I mentioned to the congregation another means of increasing serious religion, which had been infrequently practised by our forefathers and attended with eminent blessing,

51. JWL, II, p. 299.

namely, the joining in a covenant to serve God with all our heart and with all our soul. I explained this for several mornings following, and on Friday many of us kept a fast unto the Lord, beseeching Him to give us wisdom and strength to promise unto the Lord our God and keep it. Mon. 11th August. I explained once more the nature of such an engagement, and the manner of doing it acceptably to God. At six in the evening we met for that purpose at the French Church in Spitalfields. After I had recited the tenor of the covenant proposed, in the words of that blessed man, Richard Alleine, all the people stood up, in testimony of assent, to the number of about eighteen hundred persons. Such a night I scarce ever saw before. Surely the fruit of it shall remain for ever.⁵²

The words "that blessed man, Richard Alleine" give the clue as to the source from which Wesley got the idea of a Covenant Service. Dr. Duncan Coomer in a most excellent article on The Influence of Puritanism and Dissent on Methodism says of this,

The institution of the Covenant Service is perhaps the supreme example of the blending of the old serious Puritan spirit with the new emotionalism of the eighteenth-century revival. We can imagine with what relief Wesley would turn from the strange wild scenes which sometime accompanies his preaching to this solemn act in the French Church. So long as the Methodists could turn each year to a recollection of their obligations as Christians, and to a resolve to commit themselves once more to the lordship of Christ, so long would they be preserved from those perils of Antinomianism, which Wesley was always on his guard against; and by a strange

52. JWJ, IV, p. 126.

irony, not uncommon in history, the idea of a Covenant which permeated much of the Church life of early Dissent has been forgotten by them, but retained by the Methodists who were at one time the objects of their deepest suspicion. To such an extent did it become a part of the Methodist tradition that, it is said, some of the early Methodists signed it with their blood.⁵³

Dr. Coomer points out that the author was Joseph Alleine, son-in-law of Richard.

The Methodists soon began to use the weekly prayer-meeting, (early morning worship had always been insisted upon by Wesley). Sunday Schools came into being even before Robert Raikes. Special services for the authorizing of preachers and other leaders gradually developed till the work of a Methodist leader must have been completely occupying and the religious life of a member a full life indeed. This fulfilled the Founder's intention.

Part III: The Ministry of Early Methodism

In Section IX of the Plain Account Wesley writes,

This is the plainest and clearest account I can give of the people commonly called Methodists. It remains only to give you a short account of those who serve their brethren in love. These are Leaders of classes and bands (spoken of before), Assistants, Stewards, Visitors of the sick, and Schoolmasters.

In other words, Wesley was seeing under one general classification

53. Duncan Coomer, The Influence of Puritanism and Dissent on Methodism, LQR, October, 1950.

all those who "helped" him in the Methodist work. They functioned in different capacities but he looked upon them all as "Helpers."

Our task in this section is to provide in brief outline an account of those who "helped" Wesley, and to discover the roots from which these various offices were derived. We shall treat of these under three headings, namely, the Wesleys and their ordained associates, the Early Methodist preachers, and other helpers. The principal group which will be treated of must be the Early Methodist Preachers because Wesley's preachers became the most significant body of helpers in the economy of Methodism.

The Wesleys and Their Ordained Associates

The fact that Wesley was an ordained priest of the Church of England was one of the key points upon which the rise of Methodism hung. Wesley preached, organized and administered but his position as an ordained priest of the Church of England provided the link between the Church and the Religious Societies of Methodism. Charles Wesley provided a similar link, with limitations. Something will be said in the next Chapter of the restraint which Charles Wesley exercised upon the development of that course which Methodism showed a tendency to take, nevertheless he was John's closest associate and the one who continued for the most sustained period of time.

There were other ordained clergymen of the Church of England who assisted at the outset in varying degrees. A list of these is given in the Index⁵⁴ to Dr. Simon's volume John Wesley and the Methodist Societies. There were three whom Wesley counted as "Methodist Preachers," William Grimshaw, Vincent Perronet and Samuel Taylor and who "died in the work." Vincent Perronet (1693-1785), Vicar of Shoreham, was Wesley's most intimate friend and advisor. No one can say how much or how little he influenced the rise of Methodist organization but Charles Wesley called him the archbishop of Methodism. William Grimshaw (1708-1763) who was a Church of England clergyman at Haworth, Yorkshire, contributed to Methodism a group of societies which he had formed in Yorkshire, but Grimshaw's early death in 1763 removed from Wesley's side a man who was not only a kindred evangelical but one who, no doubt, would have played a large part in the inner councils of Methodism. Samuel Walker (1713-1761), the Vicar of Truro, became a supporter in 1743 and was present at the first and third Conferences. Other ordained clergymen present at the first Conference were John Hodges, Henry Piers and John Meriton. Myles adds the name of Charles Caspar Graves to this list of early ordained associates but all of these

54. Simon, John Wesley and the Methodist Societies, pp. 346-7.

"desisted from travelling."⁵⁵

One other must be mentioned of those Church of England clergymen who were associated with Wesley, namely John Fletcher of Madeley (1729-1785). Fletcher was a Swiss, noted for his saintliness, who took orders in the Church of England. He wrote the Checks to Antinomianism and was requested by Wesley to become his successor. Fletcher began to associate himself with Wesley in 1757 after the organization had taken shape. He predeceased Wesley by six years.

Although these clergymen gave Wesley needed assistance and encouragement there is no extant record of any contribution to Methodist organization on their part.

The Early Methodist Preachers

We come now to a brief study of the Early Methodist preachers and the sources from which this institution was derived.

Wesley as an Anglican priest had used Charles Delamotte in the work in Georgia and upon his return to England had left him in charge of a parish. At Herrnhut, following his conversion, Wesley "enjoyed the blessing of hearing" Christian David, a layman, preach. Wesley had no doubt about Christian David's right to preach or his gifts for preaching even

55. Myles, op. cit., p. 447.

although he knew he was a layman.

In Bristol in 1739 Cennick began to preach and Wesley encouraged him. It was one thing to use Delamotte in the preaching ministry in Georgia but quite a different matter to encourage a layman to preach in a parish in England. Humphreys, Westell, Richards and Maxfield were all preaching by the end of 1739 which brings us to the point of Wesley's acceptance of a recognized lay preaching ministry in Early Methodism.

Wesley's acceptance of a recognized order of lay preachers is one of the most interesting points in the rise of the Methodist economy. By the end of 1739 or early 1740 Wesley had satisfied himself that lay preaching was Scriptural, that to exercise the preaching office did not require ordination and therefore did not raise serious issues of ecclesiastical government, and that certain Christians, without ordination, had the three qualifications essential to the preaching office, namely, grace, gifts and a divine call.⁵⁶

The urgency was great because the members had increased beyond the possibility of Wesley's personal oversight and it was evident that the clergymen of the Church of England, with the exception of those named above, would not come to his assistance. However, Wesley had another problem upon which

56. JWL, III, pp. 143-147. Letter to Samuel Walker (1755).

he had to receive light before he could proceed to institutionalize an order of lay preachers and that was the authority by which they would be governed and which they would recognize.

The key to the basis of the "United Societies" came with the illumination that the authority would rest in himself. Those seeking had requested his tutelage and would accept his headship and at his request, if deemed necessary, would withdraw. He now decided he would bring into existence an order of lay helpers whose existence and control would rest entirely in himself, or at most in himself and Charles. In this we see again both Wesley's mind and experience at work and his typical readiness to act. Due to his experience with the religious societies his conclusion was that societies governed by the members fell into controversy and division hence, his setting up of the "United Societies" in which all authority rested in himself. This became for Wesley a necessary principle of operation.

In his acceptance of a lay ministry we have an exact parallel. The Bristol societies and, especially Kingswood, separated in controversy because Cennick's relationship to Wesley had not been sufficiently clarified. Cennick parted with Wesley in bitterness and not only took part of the society with him but also drove a wedge between Wesley and his strongest ordained co-worker, Whitefield. A somewhat similar situation was developing in London with John Simpson. The issue called

for decision and Wesley's decision was the same as before. He would take the responsibility for a number of lay helpers whose office would rest in his authority. His thought seems to have been that they would request to serve him, just as the United Society members requested him to lead them, and so they would place themselves fully under his authority and direction. As they were his "spiritual" children the term "sons in the Gospel" came naturally enough into use.

This is the explanation of the Maxfield incident which Rev. Frank Baker reminds us is recorded as hearsay in Coke and Moore's Life, but upon which account the rise of the Methodist ministry has tended to rest. Wesley in the midst of the Cennick controversy in Bristol, where Cennick had "turned preacher" and was breaking up Wesley's work, received word that Maxfield in London "had turned preacher" and rushed to London to prevent a similar controversy to that which was occurring or had just occurred in Bristol. However, Wesley was confronted with a different situation. His mother and Lady Huntingdon both gave him their counsel and after hearing Maxfield preach, while having conversation and prayer with him the point upon which the Early Methodist lay ministry was to exist emerged, namely an order of so-called Sons in the Gospel who should offer themselves to assist Wesley and place themselves under his absolute direction.

Dr. Eayrs in the New History remarks "It is difficult to say why Wesley disapproved of Maxfield and Westell when he had encouraged Cennick,"⁵⁷ to which the answer is that if the above interpretation of this very central point of Early Methodist history is correct then the reasons for Wesley's acting as he did in relation to each of the above-named becomes abundantly clear.

The date of the Maxfield incident has again been the subject of careful investigation by Rev. Frank Baker and Dr. James Wilder, Jr. The fixing of that date fixes the date for the rise of the Methodist ministry and is therefore of perennial interest. However, these two investigators do not entirely agree. Rev. Frank Baker fixes the date on "Wesley's hasty return from Bristol on 21st January 1741" or "Wesley's return on 26th March" of the same year; while Dr. Wilder believes that the occasion was upon one of Wesley's returns from Bristol in 1740. This however is close enough and, in the light of related events, makes that date very significant.

Wesley's letter to Thomas Taylor (?) in 1780 is such a clear statement of the basis of the Early Methodist ministry that we quote it in its entirety.

MY DEAR BROTHER,--You seem to me not to have well considered the Rules of an Helper or the rise of Methodism. It pleased God by me to awaken, first my brother, and then a few

57. Op. cit., Vol. I, p. 292.

others; who severally desired of me as a favour that I would direct them in all things. After my return from Georgia many were both awakened and converted to God. One and another and another of these desired to join with me as sons in the gospel, to be directed by me. I drew up a few plain rules (observe, there was no Conference in being!), and permitted them to join me on these conditions. Whoever, therefore, violates the conditions, particularly that of being directed by me in the work, does ipso facto disjoin himself from me. This Brother M'Nab has done (but he cannot see that he has done amiss); and he would have it a common cause--that is, he would have all the preachers do the same. He thinks "they have a right so to do." So they have. They have a right to disjoin themselves from me whenever they please. But they cannot, in the nature of the thing, join with me any longer than they are directed by me. And what if fifty of the present preachers disjoined themselves! What should I lose thereby? Only a great deal of labour and care, which I do not seek, but endure, because no one else either can or will.

You seem likewise to have quite a wrong idea of a Conference. For about six years after my return to England there was no such thing. I then desired some of our preachers to meet me, in order to advise, not control me. And you may observe they had no power at all but what I exercised through them. I chose to exercise the power which God had given me in this manner, both to avoid ostentation and gently to habituate the people to obey them when I should be taken from their head. But as long as I remain with them the fundamental rule of Methodism remains inviolate. As long as any preacher joins with me he is to be directed by me in his work. Do not you see, then, that Brother M'Nab, whatever his intentions might be, acted as wrong as wrong could be? and that the representing of this as the common cause of the preachers was the way to common destruction, the way to turn

all their heads and to set them in arms ?
 It was a blow at the very root of Methodism.
 I could not therefore do less than I did;
 it was the very least that could be done, for
 fear that evil should spread.

I do not willingly speak of these things
 at all; but I do it now out of necessity,
 because I perceive the mind of you and some
 others is a little hurt by not seeing them in
 a true light.--I am Your affectionate brother.⁵⁸

The question of who was the first Methodist preacher is
 gone into in detail in Dr. Wilder's work. He writes,

This confusion has largely grown out of
 a failure to distinguish between two ques-
 tions, First, who was the first Methodist
 lay preacher? Second, who was the first
 lay preacher who assisted Wesley?....Using
 November 1739 as a starting point and
 answering the first two questions, some
 of the confusion can certainly be dispelled.
 The first Methodist lay preacher was Thomas
 Maxfield (Charles Atmore, Methodist Memorial,
 XXXV and p. 2666, says that Thomas Maxfield
 was the first regular lay preacher, Curnock
 in notes to the Journal, II, p. 352, says
 that Maxfield was the first of the Methodist
Society that acted as a lay preacher.) The
 first layman who assisted Wesley as a full-
 time helper was Charles Delamotte in Georgia
 followed later by John Cennick, then Joseph
 Humphreys. After Wesley's full acceptance
 of Maxfield as a "son in the Gospel" the
 pattern was set.⁵⁹

At first all were helpers, sometimes called assistants.
 With the acceptance of preaching helpers a new distinction
 came into being. Gradually these preachers began to be dis-
 tinguished as local, i.e. those who remained in their trade

58. JWL, VII, pp. 375-6.

59. Wilder, Jr., op. cit., pp. 122-124.

and served part-time; and travelling or itinerant, i.e. those who served full-time and travelled as Wesley directed. "Some of his lay preachers began to itinerate in 1740."⁶⁰ In 1742 there were societies in eight shires. In 1744 there were forty such preachers, six of whom were invited to attend the First Conference. In 1745 Conference agreed to set up the office of "Assistant," that is, certain preachers who would supervise others and in the same year Wesley wrote his defence of a lay ministry in the Farther Appeal. In 1746 with the formation of circuits the office of assistant took the form of superintendent of a circuit. Thus the Methodist ministerial pattern began to emerge in its most salient features.

For these workers Wesley drew up his Twelve Rules of a Helper which were written into the 1744 Minutes with a thirteenth rule in 1745. The Large Minutes (printed 1791) contain a detailed definition of the office of a Helper and rules to cover every part of the helper's work revealing the development which had taken place throughout the years. The 1744 Minutes inquire "How shall we try those who think they are moved by the Holy Ghost, and called of God to preach?" and here we have the beginnings of what was to develop into the Methodist discipline as relating to the ministry.

60. A New History of Methodism, I, p. 294.

Myles lists 220 in "The First Race of Methodist Preachers" and 470 in the "First" and "Second" together. Of the first 118, 105 desisted from preaching and 113 died a premature death. Fortunately Wesley recaptured for posterity the record of the lives of many of these early helpers. No more spiritual body of men ever "saved souls" or challenged the Christian ministry to a realization of its calling in grace, gifts, equipment and effectiveness than this lay ministry of Early Methodism. The development of a regularly ordained ministry came after Wesley's death.

The roots of the Early Methodist ministry are to be found within the unfolding system. The Early Methodist ministry was Methodism's most distinctive institution and one which took its rise and found its early development as a distinctively Methodist product. In the following Chapter a theory will be put forward as to Quaker influence upon Wesley in his decision to adopt a lay and itinerant ministry for his religious societies but the principle of such a ministry once accepted, its form, use and development must be accredited to Wesley and Wesley alone.

The other helpers mentioned by Wesley were Leaders of classes and bands, Stewards, Visitors of the sick and Schoolmasters. Of this group of helpers the stewards will be included under Administrative Officers.

Visitors of the sick do not require special attention except to quote Wesley who says "Upon reflection, I saw how exactly in this also we had copied after the primitive Church." The duties of a Visitor of the sick are stated in the Plain Account.⁶¹

It is not necessary to do more than note that Schoolmasters were included by Wesley as helpers. On two occasions he wrote a brief address "To All Parents and Schoolmasters."

The Leaders of classes and bands are especially important. As has been stated the original societies became too large for the close oversight of members. Bands were in existence but their purpose was to provide intimate fellowship for small companies of mature Christians numbering three or four persons. The rise of classes was something "for which we have cause to bless God ever since." The class provided an intermediate group between the large society and the small band to serve the purpose for which the societies were designed originally. Wesley insisted upon direction by leaders according to the Rules. He never disallowed the possibility of the Holy Spirit working through group-wisdom but he insisted that Methodist meetings should be conducted by leaders according to the Rules. He was determined that the meetings should not be

61. JWL, II, p. 306.

turned into some other kind of fellowship. It is easy to see then how significant class and band leaders were, especially when we remember that Wesley was constantly traveling and usually far away, that the superintendent travelled over a circuit many miles in extent, which permitted his appearance before each society perhaps only once a month, and the preachers itinerated according to the "Plan." Hence it is obvious how important were the offices of class and band leader, and the prestige and power associated with each.

The Works⁶² contain Rules of the Band-Societies and Directions Given to the Band-Societies. The duties of a Class Leader are stated in the Plain Account and in the Works.⁶³ The Large Minutes give instructions for both classes and bands and their leaders. Q. 11 inquired "How may the Leaders of classes be made more useful?" Part (2) of the answer reads "Let each Leader carefully inquire how every soul in his class prospers; not only how each person observes the outward Rules, but how he grows in the knowledge and love of God." Bishop McConnell indicates the significance of these offices.

The small Methodist societies all over England were instruments and fields for the development of leaders. Even a class leader, entrusted with the financial and spiritual guidance of

62. JWW, VIII, pp. 272-4.

63. JWL, II, p. 297; JWW, XIII, p. 259.

a group of not more than a dozen persons, was a figure of consequence in the Methodist community....Similarly, the intimate knowledge of human nature, as it acts ordinarily and in crisis, was learned by the leaders of the units of Methodism until many became veritable experts.⁶⁴

The extent to which offices like that of class and band leader developed latent capacities both within the Methodism Societies and in the community can hardly be overestimated. Within Methodism itself the large body of class leaders became the main reservoir from which the supply of preachers was drawn. Their roots derived from within the Societies, the office of class-leader was a completely Methodist and group-wisdom product while the office of band-leader, which may have been adapted from Moravianism along with the band, was in Wesley's use of it largely a Methodist product.

Thus the Methodist economy which at Wesley's death included seventy-two thousand members in England was characterized by a vast body of helpers filling many and varied offices serving not only the Methodist people but also spreading "Scriptural holiness over the land."

Part IV: The Administrative Structure of Early

Methodism

Early Methodism functioned as a connexional system. A

64. McConnell, op. cit., p. 237.

connexion was defined as a group of scattered religious communities connected by itinerant evangelists.

However, it must be added that Early Methodism beginning as a simple connexional system soon developed into a somewhat different type of connexion. Dr. W. J. Townsend defines this more developed connexional system as follows:

The improved means of communication made possible also the thorough working out of the connexional idea. If roads had continued to be as bad as in the youth of Wesley, the power of control by a central Conference would have proved impossible or pernicious. Methodism, especially in the remote districts of the country, would have drifted in due time into local churches, only loosely held together by legal ties. But with the new means of communication there came a new ease in working out the connexional principle. The Annual Conference became a reality, in touch with the whole country; not the executive meeting of a few officials, but the general gathering of ministers, and later of laymen also, from far and wide. The synods, committees, and other central courts of Methodism were capable of being held without undue expense or excessive localization. In a word, connexionalism--the intercourse of part with part, the circulation throughout the whole system of the same principles and methods of government--was made possible and easy of accomplishment.⁶⁵

This paragraph contains a definition and a description of connexionalism which speaks in terms of the operation of a system of church government rather than a system in which

65. Townsend, A New History of Methodism, I, p. 342.

a body of itinerants are the uniting link. It describes the form into which Methodism developed in its second stage and by which it brought into existence a new type of connexion. English Methodism today boasts that connexionalism is its outstanding organizational feature.

The first question in the 1749 Minutes asks "Can there be any such thing as a general union of our Societies throughout England?"⁶⁶ The answer is

A proposal for this was made above a year ago. The substance of this proposal was, to regard the Society in London as the mother church; and for every assistant in country Circuits to inquire particularly into the state of his Circuit, and send such information to the stewards of the London Circuit, who would then, in case of need, settle a regular correspondence with all the societies. It was also proposed, that a yearly collection should be established, out of which any pressing Society debts should be discharged, and any Society suffering persecution, or in real distress, might speedily be relieved.⁶⁷

This new connexional principle appears to have been suggested to Wesley in this manner. Contemplating its effects he exultantly exclaimed, "Being thus united in one body, of which Christ Jesus is the Head, neither the world nor the devil will be able to separate us in time, or in eternity."⁶⁸ We are constrained to ask "Was John Bennet the one who made

66. Smith, op. cit., I, p. 266.

67. Ibid., p. 266.

68. Ibid.

this proposal?"

Smith continues,

This measure led to the appointment of a superintendent preacher in each circuit, under the name of "an assistant," which was applied because he specially assisted Wesley. The name, as we have seen, frequently appears in the Minutes of preceding years; but it seems, from the following questions and answers, that the office was now more clearly defined, and invested with new and enlarged responsibilities and this must certainly be regarded as an important step in Methodist organization.⁶⁹

Following the Conference of 1746 the Circuit system was in effect and became in time the chief medium of the operation of the Early Methodist Connexion. The decisions of Conference were carried out by means of the circuit organization. The Assistant was assigned to act for Wesley in administering the Circuit.

The preacher's appointments to conduct services in the societies were stated on a written or printed plan which gave particulars of places, times, dates, preachers, etc. The first plan seems to have been made by Wesley for the London Circuit in 1754.⁷⁰

The origin of the Circuit, or "Round," as it was first called, was that Methodism fell heir to and absorbed a number of Rounds which were already in existence having been founded

69. Ibid., p. 267.

70. Eayrs, A New History of Methodism, I, p. 299. Reference to WHS, iii, 21. Note by Rev. T. E. Brigden.

by itinerant evangelists who became converts to Methodism and brought their circuits into the Methodist fold. In so doing they brought in also the idea of a group of societies organized under an itinerant. This development soon spread to the whole Methodist economy providing a new organizational pattern in between the Conference and the individual societies.

The primary credit for the introduction of the Circuit system into Early Methodism goes to John Bennet who later married Grace Murray and whose name is perpetuated in the Bennet "Minutes."

John Bennet was a Derbyshire man....had studied law and was of some social standing among his Derbyshire neighbours. When he was converted he gave himself to the work of an evangelist, and formed a number of Societies in Derbyshire and Yorkshire. At first he carried on an independent mission; but after a time he placed his Societies under the care of John Wesley and became a Methodist lay preacher.⁷¹

Bennet heard Wesley preach at Dewsbury Moor on the return from his first trip to the North in 1742; in 1743 he joined Wesley bringing his Societies some time later. He is listed as a lay preacher in 1743 (Myles), he travelled with Wesley in June 1744 through Cheshire and Lancashire and was present at the First Conference; in 1745 his name appears as an Assistant, and in 1746 the Minutes record the grouping of

71. Simon, John Wesley and the Methodist Societies, p. 119.

the Societies in Circuits for the first time, number 5 of which is "Yorkshire: which includes Cheshire, Lancashire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Rutlandshire and Lincolnshire."⁷²

However to return to 1745, as Wesley journeyed toward the South from Newcastle, "Friday and Saturday" (April 26, 27), he records, "at John Bennet's request, I preached at several places in Lancashire and Cheshire." He was impressed with one feature of Bennet's organization in particular because several months later in Cornwall, to quote Dr. Simon,

On Saturday, July 13, he met the stewards of all the Societies in the circuit. During his journey from Newcastle to London he became more closely acquainted with the societies which John Bennet had formed in Cheshire, Derbyshire, and Lancashire. He preached in several of them, and it is undoubted that he was impressed with a feature of their organization which he saw to be of great value. Bennet had instituted a system of quarterly meetings in which the officials of the "Round" gave an account of the condition of the several societies, and transacted necessary business. In connexion with these meetings religious services were held.⁷³

In 1745 the Darney and Grimshaw Societies in Yorkshire and Lancashire also came into Early Methodism. William Darney was a Scotsman, called "Scotch Will," who after his conversion came into Yorkshire and Lancashire preaching and forming

72. Smith, op. cit., I, p. 249.

73. Simon, John Wesley and the Methodist Societies, p. 255.

societies.⁷⁴ One of his converts in 1742 was Rev. William Grimshaw, Rector of Haworth, Yorkshire. Grimshaw continued in his parish but commenced preaching beyond its bounds and forming societies. In 1745 he brought these societies within Early Methodism, acting himself as an assistant to Wesley. In 1747⁷⁵ he began in addition to give oversight to Darney's and Bennet's Societies, no doubt bringing his office as an ordained Anglican priest to Wesley's aid. Grimshaw's assistance must have greatly eased Wesley's burden. He also brought a group of Societies into Early Methodism at the time that the circuit idea was developing and by his oversight contributed to the idea of the office of superintendent. Grimshaw assisted Wesley till his death in 1763.

Thus during the years 1745 to 1749 the administrative structure of Early Methodism, and in particular, what might be called the intermediate structure, was shaping.

Attention must be paid next to those "meetings" which were administrative in character and which partook of the nature of ecclesiastical courts. They were the conference, the quarterly meeting and, in a measure, the leaders' meeting.

As has already been shown Wesley himself was the supreme and ubiquitous authority in Early Methodism. However these

74. JWJ, III, p. 293n.

75. Smith, op. cit., p. 256.

meetings served a very real purpose. "Wesley's advice to the new converts was: 'Strengthen you one another. Talk together as often as you can. And pray earnestly with and for another.' Thus came the first Society, soon to be noted for its class meeting, then the yearly conference and the Quarterly meeting."⁷⁶ It must be borne in mind that in Wesley's conception all meetings were for spiritual worship and fellowship and any deliberative or legislative function was expected to result from the spiritual foundation. This is exactly the point made by Rufus Jones with regard to the meetings of Quakerism. Out of the fellowship of Living Spirit was expected to come the wisdom and guidance for practice.

The First Conference was held in London in June 1744. It consisted of Wesley, his brother Charles and four other Church of England clergymen, as well as four lay preachers who were invited to attend. Wesley writes, "In 1744 I wrote to several clergymen, and to all who then served me as sons in the Gospel, desiring them to meet me in London, and to give me their advice concerning the best method of carrying on the work of God."⁷⁷

The roots from which the Early Methodist Conference was

76. John M. Versteeg, What Has Happened to the Quarterly Conference, The Christian Advocate (Chicago: June 7, 1951).

77. Smith, op. cit., I, p. 227.

derived are to be discovered mainly within Methodism itself. Wesley had proposed a Conference with certain clergymen in 1739 but due to the separation from the Moravians it was not held. It is also known that Wesley valued the wisdom of a group of spiritual minds. He was also seeking to draw into active service as many of his brother clergymen as could be persuaded. He was particularly anxious to share with others an inquiry into the foundations of religion and the church. The First Conference inquired "1. What to teach; 2. How to teach; 3. What to do: that is, how to regulate our doctrine, discipline, and practice,"⁷⁸ and the subsequent Conferences developed these themes exhaustively. The study of belief came first and organization resulted.

The idea of a conference and the use of the term was not new although by no means as common as it became later. It is right to point out that the Quakers already used the term "Conference" and the question and answer form for their minutes. Wesley was familiar with the Quaker Conferences and their Minutes.

The Conference probably acted partly under the influence of the Welsh Methodist Associations which had been started a year or two earlier. Like the Friends, the Welsh Methodists gathered together both monthly, quarterly, and annually, the regular Quarterly

78. The Large Minutes, JWW, VIII, p. 275.

Associations beginning at Watford on 6th January 1743. This meeting, like those which followed, had features in common both with the Conferences and the Quarterly Meetings of Wesleyan Methodism. That there was some reciprocal influence is practically certain, though to gauge its extent is almost impossible.⁷⁹

The nature of the Conference was a meeting called together annually of those whom Wesley deemed it right to invite. The purpose in calling them was "in order to advise, not control me."⁸⁰ The gathering had no legislative power whatsoever, except as Wesley was the governing head, although Wesley incorporated his findings in its Minutes and then used the Minutes as the law of Early Methodism. The basis for the selection of those invited is not evident except that they were those whom Wesley judged the best suited to advise him at that particular moment. Even Charles Wesley could be "given his hat." The Conferences of 1744, 1745, 1746 and 1747 dealt with doctrine, polity and discipline, and were especially important in that they contained the record of the beginnings of Methodism. There was then a lull for a year or two after which the Minutes became the annual record of the supreme court of Methodism. "The Conference was the crown and sum of the Methodist system."⁸¹ In 1784 Wesley by the Deed of

79. Rev. Frank Baker, The Origin of the Methodist Quarterly Meeting, LQR, January, 1949, p. 29.

80. JWL, VI, p. 376.

81. Eays, A New History of Methodism, I, p. 309.

Declaration established the Conference as the legal governing and property-holding court of the Methodist Church to become effective at the time of his death.

The second court in the Early Methodist ecclesiastical structure was the Circuit Quarterly Meeting. If there is no evidence to trace the origin of the Conference beyond itself this is not true of the Quarterly meeting. Rev. Frank Baker⁸² has recently investigated the roots of the Quarterly meeting tracing its adaptation mainly to Quakerism. This investigation shows that John Bennet was in touch with the Quakers and was familiar with their practices. He adapted their Quarterly meeting to his own societies and was largely instrumental in bringing it into Methodism during the years 1743 to 1749.

When John Bennet brought his "Round" into Methodism he brought both the circuit system and the quarterly meeting. The question was asked whether it was Bennet who proposed "the union of all the societies" in the connexional system. Rev. Frank Baker believes it was.⁸³ Bennet had ability for organization. Bennet offended greatly against Early Methodism and has not received the credit which ought to be his due for his contribution to the intermediate structure of

82. Baker, The Origin of the Methodist Quarterly Meeting, LQR, January, 1949.

83. Ibid., p. 33.

Methodism organization.

Bennet got the quarterly meeting from Quakerism with which he was in contact and by which he was influenced. "That Bennet's inspiration in thus forming and assisting at the formation of Quarterly Meetings came largely from the Friends is fairly certain."⁸⁴ This being the case, there is direct indebtedness to Quakerism for not only the quarterly meeting but for that influence which Bennet exercised on the development of the second stage of the working structure of the Methodist system. The question of Quaker influence at the first formative period of Methodist organization at Bristol in 1739-41 will be discussed in the next chapter. In welcoming Bennet and his work, Wesley introduced Quaker influence and organization into the second formative period of Early Methodism.

The first Quarterly Meeting was held at Todmorden Edge in 1748. Todmorden Edge was within William Darney's "Round" but John Bennet was present and William Grimshaw presided. Grimshaw wrote the Minutes and Bennet recorded the event in his journal, writing a full account to Wesley dated Chinley Oct. 22d, 1748.⁸⁵ This meeting and those which followed at Wesley's request stereotyped in rough form the intermediate

84. Ibid., p. 33.

85. Ibid., pp. 39-32.

structure of Early Methodism which was growing up around the recently-adopted circuit system. The societies were registered and membership tabulated. Stewards were appointed and finances reported on and administered. By 1753 this meeting had become the administrative unit of the circuit, the superintendent being the chairman.

The Leaders' Meeting need not concern us at length. It was the coming together of the class leaders. Its purpose was primarily spiritual for the quickening and indoctrination of those in whose hands the very life of Methodism was nurtured at its most popular level. The leaders reported on the membership; they also handed over to the stewards the contributions received. Women found their place in the life of Early Methodism in both the Leaders' and the Quarterly Meetings.

The administrative officers of Early Methodism were Wesley, the superintendents, the stewards and the trustees.

Wesley administered in Conference, quarterly meeting, leaders' meeting; in society, class and band; by rule, letter, publication and conversation; in meeting-house, in homes, in the open-air, from the saddle. One of his favourite administrative methods was that the superintendent, preacher, class-leader or other influential person would ride with him from one place of service to the next or possibly even for some days at a time, and at each step of the way Wesley

indoctrinated and administered the affairs of Methodism.

The superintendents or assistants, after that office came into existence, acted as Wesley's personal representative in charge of a circuit in all matters, including temporal affairs. The superintendent presided at the quarterly meeting and reported to Wesley in London. The superintendent's was a full life indeed. He was administrator, organizer, missionary, counsellor, overseer of the preachers and confidant of Wesley. His was such an important office upon which so much depended that it is not surprising that on more than one occasion the Minutes inquire how the office of assistant can be made more effective.

The office of steward, however, was the distinctive one for the administration of temporal affairs. In the Plain Account Wesley writes,

X. 1. But long before this I felt the weight of a far different care--namely, care of temporal things. The quarterly subscriptions amounted, at a mean computation, to above three hundred pounds a year. This was to be laid out, partly in repairs, partly in other necessary expenses, and partly in paying debts. The weekly contributions fell little short of eight pounds a week; which was to be distributed as every one had need. And I was expected to take thought for all these things: but it was a burthen I was not able to bear; so I chose out first one, then four, and after a time seven, as prudent men as I knew, and desired them to take charge of these things upon themselves, that I might have no encumbrance of this kind.

2. The business of these Stewards is,--To manage the temporal things of the Society. To receive the subscriptions and contributions. To expend what is needful from time to time. To send relief to the poor. To keep an exact account of all receipts and expenses. To inform the Minister if any of the rules of the Society are not punctually observed. To tell the preachers in love if they think anything amiss either in their doctrine or life.

3. The rules of the Stewards are,--
 (1) Be frugal. Save everything that can be saved honestly. (2) Spend no more than you receive. Contract no debts. (3) Have no long accounts. Pay everything within the week. (4) Give none that asks relief either an ill word or an ill look. Do not hurt them, if you cannot help. (5) Expect no thanks from man.

4. They met together at six every Thursday morning, consulted on the business which came before them, sent relief to the sick as every one had need, and gave the remainder of what had been contributed each week to those who appeared to be in the most pressing want. So that all was concluded within the week; what was brought on Tuesday being constantly expended on Thursday. I soon had the pleasure to find that all these temporal things were done with the utmost faithfulness and exactness; so that my cares of this kind were at an end. I had only to revise the accounts, to tell them if I thought anything might be amended, and to consult how deficiencies might be supplied from time to time; for these were frequent and large (so far were we from abundance), the income by no means answering the expenses. But, that we might not faint, sometimes we had unforeseen helps in times of the greatest perplexity. At other times we borrowed larger or smaller sums; of which the greatest part has since been repaid. But I owe some hundred pounds to this day. So much have I gained by preaching the gospel!86

There is some confusion in Wesley's own writing about the time of the appointment of the first steward. "So here," wrote Wesley, "was the first steward; and afterwards I desired one or two more to help me as stewards, and in process of time a great number."⁸⁷ The point seems to have been that at the first appointment Wesley was thinking only of someone to help him in the handling of small sums of money and in no sense of a church office; whereas as time passed and Early Methodism began to take on the character of an ecclesiastical structure, the office was viewed more in the light of the New Testament office of deacon but the name "steward" was retained. It was in the quarterly meeting that the stewards gave an account of their stewardship. Methodism has magnified the office of steward combining in it the two Presbyterian offices of elder and deacon. It is also the equivalent of the Baptist office of deacon. There is no need to search beyond the Methodist economy for the roots of this office. It is sufficient to remind ourselves that in the Early Methodist economy every office-bearer had to have the qualifications of grace and gifts, in this case the gift of administering temporal affairs.

Part V: The Discipline of Early Methodism

Dr. David S. Schaff defines Christian Discipline as

87. JWJ, VIII, p. 311.

follows:

Church discipline is that body of measures which have been employed in the Christian Church to secure its own purity and the spiritual wellbeing of its members by the punishment of offenders against its constitution and teachings. The authority for such procedure is based (1) upon the very nature of the Church as a select body with a code of its own; (2) upon express commands of Christ; (3) upon Apostolic precepts and examples afforded in the history of the Apostolic Church. The Church, as an institution endowed with the quality of holiness and entrusted with the deposit of revealed truth, is bound to keep itself free from corrupting elements which might taint its purity and thwart its activity in training its members and in bearing witness to the world. As it concerns the offender, discipline is intended (1) to reclaim him from error of doctrine or impurity of life, so that, if possible, his soul may be saved; or (2) to cut him off, as a withered branch, from the body of Christ and all participation in its benefits. In the development of the Canon Law, such punishments were termed either medicinal (*paenae medicinales*) or strictly penal (*paenae vindicativae*). The former are corrective and reformatory; the latter, while, according to canonists, they do not wholly exclude this idea, are mainly concerned with the vindication of the majesty of the law and the removal of all danger to the Church from contagion.Pure as is the operation of the Holy Spirit, and spotless as is the ideal Church, the bride of Christ, it was predicted by Christ that offences would arise. Such offences were manifested in the earliest days of the Church's history.....The Church's right to exercise discipline was definitely conferred when Christ empowered His Apostles to bind and loose.Three things, made prominent by the Reformers, were adapted to reduce the value of the Church discipline and to limit the application of a disciplinary code: (1)

the principle emphasizing the immediate responsibility of the Christian to God; (2) the authority of Scripture as the supreme rule of life; (3) the insistence upon preaching as the chief element in the power of the keys--a view which passed into the Augsburg (Schaff, *Creeds*, iii, 59) and other Protestant Confessions.....The Anglican Thirty-Nine Articles commended excommunication (xxxiii.), but are not clear in defining the tribunal before which a person should come before being received back into the communion of the Church, the words running "received into the Church by a judge that hath authority thereunto," By virtue of the supreme headship of the Church in England inhering in the sovereign, discipline for Church offences was exercised by the civil authority. This principle was not combated by the Puritan party in Elizabeth's reign, but only the application of it whereby they suffered for disobedience to the Act of Uniformity.⁸⁸

In the Plain Account Wesley gives the following account of the rise of the Early Methodist discipline.

IV. 1. As the Society increased, I found it required still greater care to separate the precious from the vile. In order to do this I determined, at least once in three months, to talk with every member myself, and to inquire at their own mouths, as well as of their Leaders and neighbours, whether they grew in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. At these seasons I likewise particularly inquire whether there be any misunderstanding or difference among them, that every hindrance of peace and brotherly love may be taken out of the way.

2. To each of those of whose seriousness and good conversation I found no reason to doubt I gave a testimony under my own

88. Schaff, "Discipline," Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, ed. James Hastings, Vol. IV.

hand by writing their name on a ticket prepared for that purpose, every ticket implying as strong a recommendation of the person to whom it was given as if I had wrote at length, "I believe the bearer hereof to be one that fears God and works righteousness."

3. Those who bore these tickets (these or tesserae, as the ancients termed them, being of just the same force with the mentioned by the Apostle), "commendatory letters," wherever they came, were acknowledged by their brethren and received with all cheerfulness. These were likewise of use in other respects. By these it was easily distinguished, when the Society were to meet apart, who were members of it and who not. These also supplied us with a quiet and inoffensive method of removing any disorderly member. He has no new ticket at the quarterly visitation (for so often the tickets are changed), and hereby it is immediately known that he is no longer of the community.⁸⁹

Wesley's problem was "to separate the precious from the vile." This was more urgent since his objective was "to spread Scriptural holiness over the land" and especially since in A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion Part II he had hailed practically all existing religious communities to the bar of New Testament judgment.

The condition of membership upon which the "United Societies" arose placed the issue of discipline entirely in Wesley's hands, "they desired him to advise them" and they agreed to go quietly away when they no longer wished to

89. JWL, II, p. 300.

continue under his leadership. However human nature is not always so agreeable and it was inevitable that offences should come.

The Fetter Lane controversy was fresh in Wesley's mind. It had convinced him that the affairs of a society such as choice of leader and the interpretation of beliefs, should not rest with the members. It had also taught him that the power to exclude ought to rest in a head not chosen by the members. This controversy had turned upon an exceedingly minute theological and experiential issue yet it had sowed discord among brethren and injured the work of God. Wesley was convinced that what he called "opinions," especially when controverted in pride, was a greater offence than many venial sins.

Wesley after the formation of the "United Societies" was faced with the necessity to discipline individuals. This, no doubt, was aggravated by his insistence upon free grace and his bitter antagonism to the Calvinist doctrine of perseverance. He sought to meet the problem of discipline as well as to nurture growth by his graduated societies.

The first major act of Early Methodist discipline followed upon the Calvinistic controversy in Bristol commencing in December 1740 and continuing till March 6th, 1741 led by Cennick. The reasons for the expulsion are given in the

Journal for this date. Later when Cennick's followers tried to insist that the test was theological Wesley replied that the expulsion was for quarrelsomeness. Discipline in this case must have been very difficult for Wesley as it raised an issue between himself and Whitefield.

However, the strict exercise of discipline upon the members continued quite apart from controversial issues. The Journal for a month later, April 7, 1741 shows us the discipline that was operative in the early Societies.

In the evening, having desired all the bands to meet, I read over the names of the United Society, and marked all those who were of doubtful character, that full inquiry might be made concerning them. On Thursday, at the meeting of that society, I read over the names of these, and desired to speak with each of them the next day, as soon as they had opportunity. Many of them afterwards gave sufficient proof that they were seeking Christ in sincerity. The rest I determined to keep on trial, till the doubts concerning them were removed.⁹⁰

Wesley's accounts of the exercise of discipline at Newcastle seem to be more full or it may have been that the people there required a firmer hand. In the Journal the record for Sunday March 6, 1743 reads,

I read over in the society the rules which all our members are to observe; and desired everyone seriously to consider whether he

90. JWJ, II, p. 442.

was willing to conform thereto or no. That this would shake many of them I knew well; and therefore, on Monday the 7th, I began visiting the classes again, lest "that which is lame should be turned out of the way."

He states that seventy-six left the society; a long list follows with an imposing array of reasons for their departure from Methodism, following which is a record of sixty-four expulsions, that is excommunications, and the reasons for these expulsions. The reasons include swearing, Sabbath-breaking, drunkenness, selling liquor, quarrelling, wife-beating, lying, evil-speaking, idleness, laziness, and "Nine-and-twenty for lightness and carelessness."⁹¹

In February of 1745 the Journal reads,

On Monday and Tuesday I diligently inquired who were offended at each other, this being the sin which of all others, most easily besets the people of Newcastle. And as many of them as had leisure to meet, I had face to face. It was now an easy thing to remove their offences, for God was in the work; so that they were, one and all, as willing to be reconciled to each other as I was to have them.⁹²

Rigid discipline continued to be exercised upon every visit to Newcastle as in every other place. In March 1747 Wesley examined the classes purging the Society from above eight hundred in number to four hundred. At the same time he gives a revealing homily as to the basis upon which

91. JWJ, III, pp. 68-71.

92. JWJ, III, pp. 165-6.

Methodist discipline was exercised, with answers to criticisms.

On Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday I examined the classes. I had been often told it was impossible for me to distinguish the precious from the vile, without the miraculous discernment of spirits. But I now saw, more clearly than ever, that this might be done, and without much difficulty, supposing only two things: first, courage and steadiness in the examiner; secondly common sense and common honesty in the leader of each class. I visit, for instance, the class in the Close, of which Robert Peacock is leader. I ask, "Does this and this person in your class live in drunkenness or any outward sin? Does he go to church, and use the other means of grace? Does he meet you as often as he has opportunity?" Now, if Robert Peacock has common sense, he can answer these questions truly; and, if he has common honesty, he will. And if not, some other in the class has both, and can and will answer for him. Where is the difficulty, then, of finding out if there be any disorderly walker in this class, and, consequently, in any other? The question is not concerning the heart, but the life. And the general tenor of this I do not say cannot be known, but cannot be hid without a miracle.

Where, then, is the need of any miraculous discernment in order to purge one of those societies? Nay, where is the use of it? For if I had that discernment, I am to pass sentence only ex allegatis et probatis; not according to what I miraculously discern, but according to what is proved in the face of the sun.

The society, which the first year consisted of above eight hundred members, is now reduced to four hundred; but, according to the old proverb, the half is more than the whole. We shall not be ashamed of any of these when we speak with our enemies in the gate.⁹³

93. JWJ, III, pp. 284-5.

Wesley was fearless. His objective was New Testament holiness in the life, yet he was compassionate; indeed, one of his weaknesses was to be too generous with human frailty. Possibly for this reason, although he constantly examined members single-handed, yet he preferred to rest the exercise of discipline with the bands, that is he preferred to bring delinquents to the judgment of the inner spiritual community. "Expulsions from membership," says Dr. Eayrs in the New History, "were subject to 'the consent and approbation' of the members of the Band Society--a fact of much significance (Journal, February 28, 1741.)"⁹⁴ After the office of superintendent was established discipline fell within his province in the name of Wesley of course.

The Rules provided the basis upon which discipline was exercised. The above quotation from the Journal for March 6, 1743 represents an historic moment for it was in Newcastle at that time that Wesley decided to publish the Rules. He had been working them over and apparently on that occasion gave them a trial reading before the Society. On May 1, 1743 The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies, in London, Bristol, Kingswood, Newcastle-upon-Tyne,⁹⁵ etc. were printed, signed by John Wesley and Charles

94. Eayrs, A New History of Methodism, I, p. 285.

95. Vide Appendix I.

Wesley. The Rules of the Band-Societies, drawn up December 25, 1738 had been in use. The Directions Given to the Band-Societies were published December 25, 1744. There was also a set of Rules of a Select Society.

The roots of the Rules stem directly from Moravianism through the Fetter Lane Society, although Wesley's exercise of discipline was his own. The Moravian Rules had a long history. Methodist Discipline can be said to have its roots in Moravianism, and in Wesley's knowledge of the Scripture and the Early Church. Underlying both Discipline and Rules was the objective at which Wesley was aiming, "The question is not concerning the heart but the life."

It was inevitable that, with controversy, trouble-making and disorderly walking some token should be provided to identify "the precious." Tickets began to be used for this purpose. At first the band members received a quarterly ticket marked with a "B." "The ticket was a proof of membership, admitted its holder to the Band, the Love-feast, and other private meetings of the society, and served as a commendatory letter to the initiated of such as removed."⁹⁶ After the rise of classes, tickets were also given to class members.

96. Eayrs, A New History of Methodism, I, p. 286.

With the emergence of an order of preachers there naturally came into existence a body of Rules by which, under Wesley, they were governed. It has been shown that the key to the order of the "sons in the Gospel" was their complete submission to Wesley. His constant injunction to the preachers was to obey the rules not to amend them. The first of these sets of rules was the "Rules of an Assistant" drawn up by the First Conference in 1744. They are to be found in the Bennet Minutes. Later these were revised and became the familiar Twelve Rules of a Helper⁹⁷ which have continued to this day. Simon⁹⁸ discusses briefly the two rules which were omitted in the latter. The First Conference also drew up a set of Rules to govern the office of Steward.

To pass over the intervening years and to show that no change took place in Wesley's lifetime in the "fundamental rule" of the Discipline as it governed the now extensive Methodist ministry it is recommended that the letter to Thomas Taylor (?) of January 18, 1780 be read in its entirety. "Whoever, therefore, violates the conditions, particularly that of being directed by me in the work, does ipso facto disjoin himself from me."⁹⁹

The Large Minutes came to be accepted as the Discipline

97. Vide Appendix II.

98. Simon, op. cit., pp. 216-7.

99. JWL, VI, p. 375.

by which the church was governed. The Deed of Declaration 1784 was Wesley's consolidation of the total economy of Methodism as it had come into being and its transmission, at his death, to the incoming Methodist Church. The present day "Discipline" is the ultimate result of Wesley's "Methodism." The Methodist Superintendent has to be an expert to know and administer the Rules, for instance the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America in its latest issue (1948) runs to 539 pages exclusive of appendices. Yet it is to be remembered that Wesley's objective was "holiness" with all rooted in the spiritual; in life, not law.

Part VI: The Property of Early Methodism

For our purpose it is necessary only to indicate that Early Methodism acquired property and the particular manner in which it was held.

The first building for the use of the Methodists was acquired in 1739. The building was the King's Foundery, Moorfields, London....In the same year an erection, the New Room in the Horsefair, Bristol, was begun.¹⁰⁰

Tyerman writing for 1742 and speaking of the Newcastle Orphan House says,

100. Eayrs, A New History of Methodism, I, p. 290.

on December 20, the foundation stone was laid....The building was calculated to cost £700; Wesley had just twenty-six shillings towards this expenditure. This "clumsy, ponderous pile" as John Hampson calls it, was then the largest Methodist meeting-house in England....Here one of the first Sunday-schools in the kingdom was established, and had not fewer than a thousand children in attendance. Here a Bible society existed before the British and Foreign Bible Society was formed. Here was one of the best choirs in England.Here was the resting place of John Wesley's first itinerants; and here colliers and keelmen, from all parts of the surrounding country, would assemble, and, after the evening service, would throw themselves upon the benches, and sleep the few remaining hours till Wesley preached at five next morning. The "clumsy, ponderous" old Orphan House was the head quarters of Methodism in the north of England. Within the last four years Wesley had built "the room" at Bristol, and the school at Kingswood; and he had bought, and repaired, and almost rebuilt "that vast, uncouth heap of ruins," called "The Foundery."¹⁰¹

Thus by 1743 Methodism was in possession of the key buildings which provided the landmarks of the famous triangle London, Bristol, Newcastle. By 1767 Methodism was in possession of one hundred buildings.¹⁰²

The possession of buildings was a necessity because of the repulsion of the Methodists from the churches but also because of the kind of work that the Methodists were doing and the class of people Methodism was winning.

101. Tyerman, op. cit., I, pp. 393-4.

102. Ibid., II, p. 611.

There were two other buildings which Wesley early acquired and which served a distinctive purpose. These were two consecrated churches in London in which Wesley held regular services and dispensed the sacraments. Why Wesley did not acquire similar buildings in other places for this same purpose is not known unless no such buildings were to be had.

About the year 1744 a clergyman offered me a chapel in West Street, Seven Dials (formerly a French church), and I began to officiate there on Sunday mornings and evenings. We did the same (my brother and I alternately) soon after at the French church in Spitalfields as soon as it came into our hands. This we continued from that time; and no one in England ever thought or called it leaving the Church.¹⁰³

The manner of holding property was another of those distinctively Wesleyan institutions and a parallel to the rise of the United Societies and the acceptance of a lay ministry. Myles records the point of the necessity for Wesley to hold property in his own name and how this came about.

The first Methodist Preaching-House, was built this year in Bristol. Concerning it, Mr. Wesley says, "On Saturday the 12th of May, 1739, the first stone was laid with the voice of praise and thanksgiving." He settled it on eleven Feoffees, but being convinced by a letter from Mr. Whitefield that as these men had the power of appointing the Preachers, they could turn even

103. JWL, VIII, pp. 140-1.

him out, if what he said or did, should not be pleasing to them; he immediately called them all together, cancelled the writings, and took the whole management respecting the building into his own hands, believing as he had said, "that the earth was the Lord's, and the fulness thereof," and in his name he set out, nothing doubting. After some time, and mature deliberation, he got the form of a trust-deed drawn up by three eminent Counsel, for the settlement of all the Preaching-Houses; which, with some little additions, continues still to be universally used amongst us.

We see that from the beginning he thought the only possible way for the work of God to continue as it had begun, was by his having the appointment of the Preachers in all the chapels under his care.¹⁰⁴

The trust-deed referred to above was drawn for Wesley in 1746¹⁰⁵ in order that the Bristol and Newcastle properties might be transferred to trustees and at the same time the essentials of Wesley's work safeguarded. The personal holding of an ever increasing number of properties in his own name was becoming an embarrassment to Wesley. Henceforth he encouraged the holding of property by local trustees, using a form of the trust-deed. Finally in 1784 by the Deed of Declaration¹⁰⁶ he transferred the ownership of Methodist property to the Conference at his death.

Disputes were bound to occur. Even as late as 1782 the

104. Myles, op. cit., p. 12; Tyerman, I, p. 270.

105. Simon, op. cit., p. 315.

106. JWJ, VIII, pp. 335-41.

prolonged dispute over the Birstall chapel gave rise to Wesley's letter to Joseph Benson in which he reviewed the whole matter of preaching-houses and their settlement and clarified the principles upon which property was held. The issue for Wesley was clear. To John Valton he wrote a month later, "The question is in the last resort, Methodism or no Methodism."¹⁰⁷ Dr. Curnock says in a note in the Journal, "The result was the Deed of Declaration, the Constitution of the Conference, and ultimately the Model Deed."¹⁰⁸

Part VII: The Worship and Creed of Early Methodism

The worship and creed of Early Methodism were not part of its organization. The worship was the expression of its faith and the creed was the root from which the organization arose consequently a brief statement of these is in order to complete this study.

As has already been made clear the worship was developed as a supplement to the regular services and ordinances of the Church of England. Nor did Early Methodism develop a creed as such. However, Wesley claimed that his Societies were founded upon the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. From 1738 onwards he was a man of one book the Bible but still insisted that the Thirty-nine Articles were the doctrinal

107. JWL, VII, p. 154.

108. JWJ, VII, p. 383n.

statement to which he adhered.

However, a body of material began to accumulate in the printed works of Wesley and in particular, certain Sermons and the early Minutes of Conference. These were freely circulated among the preachers and Early Methodist people and became the main basis of doctrine for the Societies.

In 1755 Wesley's Notes on the New Testament were published and placed in the hands of his preachers. This provided a virtual system of doctrine.

In 1763 a Model Deed was drawn up for the settlement of preaching-houses which read as follows: "the Trustees.... shall permit John Wesley....and such other persons as he shall from time to time appoint....and no other persons....that the said persons preach no other doctrine that is contained in Mr. Wesley's Notes upon the New Testament, and four volumes of sermons."¹⁰⁹ This Model Deed settled for Methodism that its creed should be the doctrine held and proclaimed by Wesley. The Deed of Declaration finally confirmed this.

Dr. Eayrs sums up the point of Early Methodist doctrine when he says that it was the message proclaimed by the preachers which was the real creed of Early Methodism.

While in general agreement with the articles and homilies of the Church of England, it

¹⁰⁹. JWW, VIII, pp. 330-31; Sugden, op. cit., I, Preface and Introduction.

emphasized certain points and gave an evangelical Arminian interpretation to all. It thus created a virtually distinct system of doctrine. With almost ceaseless iteration the preachers taught the doctrines of universal depravity, universal redemption, the witness of the Spirit or Christian assurance, the duty of testimony, and sanctification or Christian perfection. Charles Wesley's characteristic line--

O let me commend my Saviour to you, was upon their lips, and they proclaimed the five universals: that all men needed salvation; that all men might know themselves saved; that all should declare their salvation; and that all might perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord.¹¹⁰

Summary

A summary of this brief study of the organization of Early Methodism and the attempt to trace each element to its roots is as follows.

The rise of Early Methodist organization falls into two stages, the first from 1739 to 1744 and the second from 1744 to 1749. Of these two stages the following can be said.

The first stage included the rise of the meetings which were the main characteristic of the earliest years of the movement. As has been pointed out these meetings combined the spiritual and administrative functions in the belief that all was rooted in the spiritual.

¹¹⁰. Townsend, etc., The New History of Methodism, I, pp. 305-6.

The first stage, beginning with the rise of the United Societies, was virtually complete with the formation of classes in 1742. The first Conference in 1744 added the highest court and set its approval on what had gone before.

Early historians tended to trace the rise and development over the whole century of Early Methodism. Recent Methodist historians have tended to reduce the period of organization to too narrow a limit. Witness the statements of Eayrs, Church, Simon and Mumford. The fact is that the meeting elements of Early Methodism were virtually complete by 1742, that is a little more than two years after its rise in 1739. However, there was a second stage of the rise of organization just as important to the final economy of Methodism as the first. This second stage began with the first Conference in 1744 and continued till 1749, being most marked in 1746-1747. The characteristic features which appeared at this time were what we have called the intermediate structure and included the rise of circuits and the quarterly meeting, with the office of superintendent being more clearly defined. The recognition of these two stages gives greatly added insight into the nature of the organization.

The organization has been traced to the following roots and in this order of importance: to Wesley himself and the group-wisdom of the Societies, to the Bible, to the Church of England, to Moravianism and Quakerism. The indebtedness

to Quakerism will be the subject of the next chapter. There are other roots of a minor character, such as the Covenant Service from Nonconformity but these are not of major significance.

In the preceding chapter we have seen how the Quaker organization took shape in the period 1700-1750. There were two stages in this development. The first stage was 1700-1740 in which the Quakers were, for the most part, isolated and the intermediate stage was 1740-1750.

At both of these stages the Quaker movement was in contact with Quakerism, in the first, through the Quakers' association with the Bristol Quakers and, in the second, through John Widdows' knowledge of and association with Quakerism.

The writer of this thesis believes that Widdows' association was influenced by the Quakers and he will now present the evidence. First of all, it will be of great interest to see how the Quakers were viewed and how they were viewed by the Quakers. This will be a difficult task and, finally, an interpretation of what will be given.

Quakerism in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries, its Rise, Peak, Decline and Revival.

Quakerism has already been seen to be a part of English life in the seventeenth century of the religion of the lower life as against the external, ecclesiastical structure of the Established Church and later Puritanism.

George Fox (1651-1691), Having Evangelized every town

CHAPTER IV
THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS AND THE RELIGIOUS
SOCIETIES OF WESLEY

In the preceding chapter it has been shown that Wesley's organization took shape in the decade 1739 to 1749. There were two stages in this development, the formative period 1739-1742 in which the meetings arose, the second stage in which the intermediate structure developed.

At both of these moments Early Methodism was in contact with Quakerism, in the first, through Wesley's association with the Bristol Quakers and, in the second, through John Bennett's knowledge of and association with Quakerism.

The writer of this thesis believes that Wesley's organization was influenced by Quakerism and he will now proceed to present the evidence. Some of this evidence will be of a general nature, some will be specific references and finally, an interpretation of events will be given.

Quakerism in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,
Its Rise, Peak, Decline and Subsequent Revival

Reference has already been made to the rise in England in the seventeenth century of the religion of the Inner Life as against the external, ecclesiastical structure of the Established Church and later Puritanism.

George Fox (1624-1691), having investigated every form

of organized religion within his reach, came in 1643, at the age of nineteen, to a new religious faith by the experience of "Christ within," the "inner light." Fox records in his Journal,

Then, O then, I heard a voice which
said, "There is one, even Christ Jesus,
that can speak to thy condition" and
when I heard it my heart did leap for
joy.¹

He found religious companies throughout the country ready for his message, especially "the Seekers" of Westmoreland. In 1648 Fox began to establish meetings, that is, to gather small companies for worship. These companies sat in silence waiting for God, spoke or prayed when they were moved by the Spirit, and began to feel the consciousness of a great movement of the Spirit. Those who felt "led" went out to "publish truth." The Quakers had no thought of forming a new organization, they believed they had recaptured the true New Testament church and were concerned that all men might be "convinced." Those who had seen the "light" were puzzled that others could not see it, and felt a great burden for all men. The religious chaos of the Commonwealth and of the Restoration periods provided them with many opportunities for the proclamation of their message. Gatherings were held

1. George Fox, Journal, Bi-century edition, I, p. 11.

in homes and barns. Many Church of England pulpits were not filled because of purges and pluralities and the spirit-hungry people listened eagerly although the Quaker preachers would not use the pulpit. Persecution was severe but judges, magistrates and gaolers were preached to upon every possible occasion. Certainly it was a truth new to their ears which they heard proclaimed.

The writer of the article, The Society of Friends in the Encyclopedia Britannica says, "The insistence on an inward spiritual experience was the great contribution made by Friends to the religious life of the time, and to thousands it came as a new revelation."²

This belief in the Light of Christ given to every man, which came to be known as the Inner Light, was from the beginning of George Fox's teaching, and still is, the basis of Quakerism. It has, of course, been the teaching of the great mystics and many of the great religious prophets and saints down the centuries. It became for the early Friends first of all an inward experience and worked itself out in the practice of life. In seventeenth-century England there were many men and women who had missed the inwardness of religion by dwelling too much on words and outward forms--theological discussions about notions largely man-made. To them the sudden understanding of the new teaching of the early Friends was a revolution in their lives. It brought a new conception of the relation of God and man,

2. "Friends, Society of," Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. IX, 14th ed.

a peace of mind while suffering barbarous persecution; it turned quiet home-loving men and women into travellers over the earth, and it led them to emphasize the supreme importance of every individual, and so to denounce war, and later slavery, unjust economic and social conditions, and capital punishment, as well as the more personal evils of drunkenness, theiving, lying, and dishonesty. But in the seventeenth century it also frequently brought them into trouble with the State and with both Puritans (under Cromwell) and Episcopalians (under Charles II). One outcome of their beliefs was their refusal to take any oath whatsoever, for they said that to swear was contrary to the direct command of Christ. To reinforce their arguments they were not slow in pointing out to both the magistrates and Charles II himself how frequently the oath was merely a cover for hypocrisy and disloyalty--a truth which was peculiarly irritating to magistrates and judges who had found it convenient to be loyal to both Cromwell and Charles II.³

The need for some kind of organization followed upon the prophetic stage of the proclamation of the truth. It was not till 1666 (Barclay, the Younger, says 1668)⁴ that a complete system of church organization was definitely established. "The introduction of an ordered system and discipline was naturally viewed with some suspicion by people taught to believe that the inward light of each man was the only true

3. Isabel Ross, Margaret Fell, Mother of Quakerism, p. 33.

4. Barclay, The Inner Life of the Religious Societies of the Commonwealth, p. 548, table.

guide for his conduct.⁵ These marked the first and second stages.

The third stage came with the feeling of the need for a philosophy for the movement. This was provided by Robert Barclay by the publication in 1675 of his work, "An Apology for the True Christian Divinity: being an explanation and vindication of the Principles and Doctrines of the people called the Quakers." There also had arisen a tendency to "led" meetings and a recognized ministry.

Swarthmore, the home of Margaret Fell, the widow of Judge Fell, who later in 1669 married George Fox, became the home of the movement and continued so throughout her lifetime. It provided a centre, from which, with love and wisdom, the work was directed and to which the itinerants returned and received training.

The peak of Quakerism in members and evangelical zeal came about 1680, the total rising to about 60,000⁶ at that time. By 1685 the decline had commenced. Hobhouse writes as follows about the decline and the reasons for it,

The declension set in, soon after 1685, with the end of persecution. Habits of industry, thrift, and honesty combined with this to lead to material prosperity.

5. "Friends, Society of," Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. IX, 14th ed.

6. Barclay, op. cit., p. 580.

By 1730 Quakers were generally being treated with respect. Under the Whig Government, which brought in the Hanoverian Kings, they were in considerable favour with politicians and even with some of the Bishops, and secured important legislative concessions. Another powerful factor was the adoption of birthright membership, (a note says birthright membership was ratified in 1737, but had been the custom for a good many years past), which meant the transition from a "pure" Church of Believers only to a "mixed" body including many who had but an inherited and therefore often nominal religion.

The worst consequence of the changed conditions was that many Quakers grew rich and that the habit of acquiring riches was fostered. And wealth was then, as it is now, the chief cause of corruption in the Society. The best Friends knew and grieved over what was going on. George Fox preached in his last messages against the love of riches. Spiritual indifference, habits of luxury and display, compromise with unchristian customs began to be prevalent.⁷

This decline continued until about the middle of the eighteenth century. This date is significant as it is the period of the full strength of the Wesleyan revival. Hobhouse, speaking of Fanny Henshaw, who became a Quaker in 1737, says,

she no doubt took part in the movement of revival and reform which was set going soon after the middle of the century by a number of the most earnest and gifted of the Elders and Ministers of the Society.... Too much reliance was placed by these reformers on the external weapon of tightening

7. Hobhouse, William Law and Eighteenth Century Quakerism, pp. 199-200.

the rules of the "Discipline," which was intended to control in conjunction with the threat of possible "disownment," the dress, habits, and activities of the members. Nevertheless the historians inform us that the reform movement did much to arrest the growth of the spirit of worldliness and unbelief, and was the beginning of a better period for the Quaker body.⁸

It is an interesting question, for the study of the relationship of Quakerism and Wesley's embryonic organization, to know just how seriously Quakerism had declined. There has been a tendency on the part of historians to pass off the suggestion of any possible indebtedness by saying that this was a low period for Quakerism and therefore it was inconceivable that Wesley could have been influenced.

Quakerism had declined from the strength of its evangelical power three or four decades earlier but the assumption that it had nothing to give to the Wesleyan movement is entirely erroneous. Quakerism was passing through a period of decline in the third and fourth decades of the eighteenth century but its life was still very real and its main characteristics very evident. Evangelical zeal was at a low ebb but the philosophy of the movement was strong, the inner Quaker community was well knit and its itinerant preachers were active maintaining the life of the movement within the

8. Ibid., pp. 200-201.

"Society" and, at times, presenting their "Truth" to those outside.

Hobhouse quotes from the book, Later Periods of Quakerism by Rufus Jones, a description of the Quaker life and activity during the period in which Wesley had association with the movement at Bristol. It is highly significant that Rufus Jones says the "spontaneous and unorganized itinerant ministry" was the marked characteristic of this period. Excerpts from the quotation in Hobhouse are as follows:

One of the most unique features of Quakerism in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was its spontaneous and unorganized itinerant ministry. For more than a hundred years a continuous stream of travelling Ministers went forth from one end of the Society of Friends to the other. They were without question the makers and builders of the Society of the period under review. They formed a kind of "inner church" within the Church. What they called "the Truth," which was their lofty phrase for Quakerism and its spiritual ideals, absorbed them body and soul, as a patriot in the stress of his country's need is absorbed in preserving and promoting the national life.

It became a well-settled custom for these Quaker message-bearers to record their experiences in....Journals.

Rufus Jones goes on to say that the Journals show that these itinerant Ministers were of "one psychological type"

....conscious of divine intimations from early childhood....their conversion and call the direct work of God....their "mission laid out"....they spoke as they were moved....They considered themselves

the objects of peculiar providential care and guidance.

This Ministry was effective.

They made God seem real, and Christ a mighty attractive power, and eternity an affair big with destiny to men like us.

Their mission was a two fold one. Primarily, it was to build up and perfect the "Society," which for them was the true Church of Christ, the precious and peculiar Israel of God; and, secondarily, it was to proclaim their great message to the wider world out beyond their fold. They saw, as the rank and file did not see, the real significance of the Quaker faith.....They were quick to note in the membership, signs of conformity to the world or to other forms of Christian faith, while they, on the contrary, kept the gaze steadily focused on the distinct and differentiated Quaker peculiarities, and on the spiritual ideals of their Society.⁹

Such was the type of itinerant lay ministry, which John Wesley met with in the homes of the Bristol Quakers, where he was entertained. Is it beyond the possibility of history that he may have seen the very kind of instrument which he was so urgently needing to extend and nurture the life of the Methodist societies by which he would replenish the life of Christendom? Clergymen properly ordained by bishops of the Church of England simply would not assist him. But he did not need clergymen, since the question of the administration

9. Ibid., pp. 186-188.

of the sacraments was not at issue. The Church of England was there to perform the necessary ecclesiastical functions. What he needed was a type of men who, by their spiritual gifts, were qualified to provide leadership and multiply religious societies. This was exactly what he saw in the Quakerism which he met with at Bristol, an itinerant, lay ministry with marked spiritual gifts. When Wesley finally decided to use lay preachers, was it because he had seen the leadership, which a strong, lay, itinerant ministry could give in a connexional body of religious societies? A study of Quakerism in the period before us will soon remove the misconception that the way of the "Inner Light" had declined so sadly that there was no possibility of Wesley or any other earnest seeker finding a pattern of things scriptural and spiritual to be adapted and applied.

The Organization of the Society of Friends

The following gives an outline of the Organization of The Society of Friends.

The religion of the Quaker is primarily concerned with the culture and development of the inward life and with this direct correspondence with God....Organization and external systems will not interest him very much....This tendency is clearly seen in the entire form and structure of the Quaker Meeting for worship, which is on its deepest side the central feature of Quakerism. The meeting has as little organization as is consistent with order and group-procedure. The room in

which the meeting is held is usually very plain and simple. There is nothing to attract attention or to distract the mind.There is usually no desk, no focal point from which special exercises may be expected to emerge. In many Meeting-houses, there are some seats, slightly raised in front, facing the main congregation. Here those may sit who are most likely to take some vocal part in the meeting. In some instances, the seats are arranged in a square with raised seats on at least three sides of the house, so that expectation will not be turned in any one particular direction. In meetings of this type there is no fixed order of service, no chosen leader, no august figure. The meeting is a spiritual democracy and the messages on any given occasion, if there are any spoken ones, may come from any person there.¹⁰

As the meeting is held primarily for worship and communion, and not for talk, it is apt to begin, as one would expect, with a time of hush and quiet.....It is what the old Friends used to call centring down.¹¹

The meeting for worship is, however, not all silence....When the temperature and atmosphere of the group are right, the one who prays or speaks is not just a solitary individual saying words. He becomes in some real sense a voice for the co-operating group.¹²

The hush, the silence, the concentration, the expectancy, the group-cooperation, the wonder, awe and reverence all tend to prepare for the great experience, and

10. Rufus M. Jones, The Faith and Practice of the Quakers, pp. 55-56.

11. Ibid., p. 56.

12. Ibid., p. 58.

all help to make the meeting a time of inspiration and correspondence. And we may say, I think, that in such a quickened atmosphere, the person who is to speak is brought to his best state and condition for an effective message, and the rest of the group are, at the same time, attuned for the reception of it. The ideal meeting is one in which no person speaks at great length, but the torch is passed from hand to hand, and three or four speak, harmoniously interpreting the same general theme.¹³

The Society of Friends is governed by a series of "meetings" graded upwards from a small local group which meets once a month to a large inclusive body which meets annually and is called the "yearly Meeting." (The word "Meeting" is used both for the worship meeting and the administrative meeting, the idea, of course, being that these are both Spirit-inspired and therefore not essentially different.) These meetings are called preparative or congregational, monthly (which may include only one congregation or it may include two or three), quarterly and yearly.

The Monthly Meeting receives and dismisses members. It appoints "Elders," that is, those members assigned the task of caring for the spiritual life of the Society. This meeting also appoints "Overseers" who manage the pastoral work of the congregation.

13. Ibid., p. 61.

The Quarterly Meeting meets four times a year; it includes several Monthly Meetings and deals with matters which concern the interests of all. The Yearly Meeting includes many Quarterly Meetings, for instance, there is one Yearly Meeting for Great Britain, one for Ireland, and in America there are twenty-seven yearly meetings. The "Meetings for Sufferings" is maintained by the London Yearly Meeting, originally it had to do with the relief of those under persecution but now it concerns itself with the needs of the world, "the moral and spiritual tasks that go to the relief of sufferings." In all its meetings the Quaker body tries to draw out the highest possible group-wisdom. "The noblest Quaker projects are thus often not the conception of some one person but the living fruit of group-wisdom,"¹⁴ says Rufus Jones.

Quaker organization developed as a long slow growth. After the reluctant admission about 1666 that some organization was necessary to safeguard the movement from abuses as well as to maintain it, the attempt was made to discover the minimum of structure which would allow the maximum expression of the inner life. A connexional system was adopted, a means for the recognition of itinerants was developed, the

14. Ibid., p. 68.

operation of the several meetings, the recognition of membership and the use of "Elders" was evolved. "The Quaker office of overseer, for example, emerged long after that of the Methodist class leader, to whom it probably owed much."¹⁵ Thus it was a Quakerism distinctive in its general structure which Wesley knew, a movement in transition between its early and later organization.

The Close Parallels and the Marked Differences Between the Society of Friends and Wesley's Religious Societies

We will now endeavour to set forth the similarities and differences which are characteristic of Quakerism and Methodism. The great common characteristic of these two movements is that they both belong to the spiritual side of English religious history. Each in its turn is a breaking out of that latent and dynamic power which resulted from the impact of Scriptural truth upon the minds of Englishmen. Quakerism was a positive rediscovery of the inner power of the Christian faith and consequently a protest against religious systems which endeavoured to rest in external authority with little or no experience of genuine faith. Wesley,

15. Frank Baker, The Relations Between the Society of Friends and Early Methodism, LQR, July, 1949, p. 246.

likewise, chose the succession of the inward religion of the Spirit but had the advantage of a wide knowledge of the historical background of Christianity.

Quakerism and Methodism were, each, in their turn, a positive assertion of the power of the New Testament, spirit-quickenened community and a protest against formalism, externalism and ecclesiastical authority, especially where that authority rested upon the might of the secular arm. One has to conclude that Wesley, raised in the Established Church and Royalist tradition, was slow to realize consciously his indebtedness to the succession of courageous spirits who, at such unbelievable sacrifice, maintained the continuity of the religion of the inner life against the despotism of an external and authoritative system. In Chapter I his reference to King Charles the Second has been quoted. He said, "It would transcend belief, but that the vouchers are too authentic to admit of any exception." Wesley, without this realization, however, had chosen to stand for and further the religion of the Spirit and so placed himself and Early Methodism in that succession. In this we have the closest parallel between Quakerism and Methodism.

The movements were similar in essence. They were inner, pietistic and spiritual. They sought what Wesley frequently described as "the power of godliness." Each movement sought to restore the church to the primitive simplicity of the New

Testament, believing that the church had departed widely from her pure beginnings in the Master's teachings and communal fellowship. This was the reason for their existence and their main objective. Both claimed that true religion was first inward, Wesley claiming the outward to be the essential complement of the inward, Fox denying this, but both centring their emphasis on the salvation of the individual soul within the fellowship of the sanctified. In Wesley's phrase they sought "Scriptural holiness." At the outset each movement thought only in terms of the reformation of the existing institution and not of the rise of a new religious denomination.

Each had as its origin a body of religious societies, although Wesley's organizing genius manifested itself in a more rapid development. Fox believed the religious society contained all the marks of the New Testament church while Wesley's doctrine of the church included the external and visible as well as the inner and spiritual and he planned, in the beginning, only the spiritualizing of the national church. Fox had not realized that his ultimate demand implied the complete disappearance of all religious organizational structure with the necessity of replacement by an organization along the lines which Quakerism finally evolved. This lack of coherence in Fox's ecclesiastical thinking was one of the main reasons for the long period of transition required for the evolution of Quaker organization. Wesley,

in addition to his belief in the outward church, also had the total inheritance of English religious life to guide him, even though he was more familiar with the life of the National Church. In their use of the religious society they were both being true to the influence of the Continental source from which they drew, Quakerism from the Anabaptists and Wesley, from the same source, through Moravianism. In this respect both movements arose from the same spiritual root.

The similarities between the two movements can be set out under the three divisions: theology, organization and secondary matters.

In theology both Quakerism and Methodism began with the primary conviction that the soul may have immediate contact with God. This is what Dr. Eayrs calls the "primacy of the spiritual." The methods used for this contact with the Divine were fundamentally similar but with certain marked differences. In common they used the religious society, fellowship, group-wisdom, Bible Study, speaking, prayer and waiting. They differed in the use of silence and the visible sacraments.

A second religious belief held in common by both movements was the doctrine of Christian perfection. As this thesis deals with organization this is not the place to do more than note the common use of this doctrine. An implication for organization that followed from Wesley's belief in this doctrine was his attempt to graduate his societies

according to the spiritual progress of the convert.

Wesley experimented with a range of groups to provide for what he believed to be distinct stages of Christian growth. Within the Society Fox believed all should be left to the working of the spirit but Wesley was by both character and conviction a Methodist and provided rules and programmes to aid the Holy Spirit in perfecting the believer. Fox's "seekers" were initiated in silence while Wesley's were cleansed by mutual confession, but both were concerned with the development of inner spiritual religion believing that by their particular method a community of sin-free, victorious men and women could be created, the true, New Testament Body of Christ.

In organization the movements have many features which show striking parallels. It has been said earlier that both movements used the religious society as their primary unit. Each organization had one founder and spiritual father who remained throughout his lifetime the single head of the movement. The lives of both Fox and Wesley were marked by a long period of spiritual travail followed by a climacteric conversion. Each continued throughout his lifetime a kind of infallible head and ultimate authority, although each constantly endeavoured to share the direction of the movement with the societies. Each one was conscious of being a chosen instrument of destiny to his age and was spared through many

vicissitudes and for many years to establish a large work.

The work of each movement was directed from a single centre. The recognized home of Quakerism, early, came to be Swarthmore, the home and estate of Margaret Fell, while the recognized centre of Methodism, early, came to be the Foundery in London. These centres served as a clearing-house for the work and to them the workers returned or were recalled, periodically for instruction, and training. A steady stream of correspondence flowed out from the centre to the scattered societies providing direction for the work.

Each movement evolved a connexional type of structure governed by a single head, operating through a lay, itinerant ministry on the basis of an expanding principle. Quakerism relied more on the invisible working of the Holy Spirit, while Wesley, although recognizing the operation of the Spirit, tended to develop the work through carefully planned and detailed organization. Each movement freed itself, on the one hand, from the confining principle so common amongst systems of the pietistic type and, on the other, rejected the rigidity imposed by the regular ecclesiastical systems. Quakerism, however, never gained the freedom and expansive power which became such a marked characteristic of Methodism.

There is also a marked parallel in the ministry of Quakerism and Methodism, Barclay (the Younger) writes,

Fox anticipated Wesley and Whitefield in his application of field preaching to the

spreading of the Gospel, and we see all the features of the great Methodist revival both in the character and gifts of the preachers, the multitudes who listened to them, the powerful impressions produced, and the entire change of character which many permanently affected.¹⁶

The Quaker "Publishers of Truth," the early itinerants, came into being through the spontaneous working of the Spirit. The root idea that every man was enlightened by Christ directly in his own soul immediately denied a church-ordained ministry. In the Friends' Meetings everyone spoke who was moved by the Spirit. Those who felt called to "publish truth" obeyed the inner command.

Nayler gave the Puritan magistrates at Appleby in 1653 an account of the compulsion which was laid upon him to go and preach:

I was at the plough, meditating on the things of God, and suddenly I heard a voice, saying unto me, "Get thee out from thy kindred and from thy father's house, and I had a promise given in with it. Whereupon I did exceedingly rejoice, that I had heard the voice of that God which I had professed from a child, but had never known him....and when I came at home, I gave up my estate and cast out my money, but, not being obedient in the going forth, the wrath of God was upon me, so that I was made a wonder to all, and none thought I would have lived. But, after I was made willing, (Braithwaite's note is, "I conjecture that Nayler's talk

16. Barclay, op. cit., p. 311.

with Fox came at this point") I began to make some preparation as apparel and other necessaries, not knowing whither I should go; but shortly afterward, going agateward with a friend from my own house, having an old suit, without any money, having neither taken leave of wife or children, not thinking then of any journey I was commanded to go into the west, not knowing whither I should go nor what I was to do there, but when I had been there a little while, I had given me what I was to declare, and ever since I have remained, not knowing to-day what I was to do tomorrow.¹⁷

Testimonies of a similar nature were given by many of the "first race" of Methodist preachers. Wesley encouraged them to write a record of their experience. Both bodies built up a large company of itinerant preachers. Barclay says, "At one period, above seventy-three ministers were travelling over whom he (Fox) exercised control."¹⁸ This ministry was composed of laymen because the ordained clergy refused to share in "enthusiastic" and irregular movements. The chief qualifications for such a ministry were of a spiritual nature, stressing experience rather than intellectual achievement. A method of selection and control for those who felt called to "travel" had to be devised. The Quakers adopted a method of recognition and a kind of circuit system. Barclay provides evidence to prove that a regular

17. Braithwaite, Beginnings of Quakerism, p. 962.

18. Barclay, op. cit., p. 340. Barclay's reference "Letter 303.Y Taylor to Margaret Fell, 7th month, 1658."

plan of itinerancy existed at any early date supervised mainly by Fox.¹⁹ The itinerant system suffered under the transition period in Quaker organization. Through the years many experiments were attempted in the recognition and direction of the Quaker ministry.

Wesley, on the other hand, due to earlier experience with the Church of England-Moravian Societies and the effects of the Calvinistic controversy, used the method of "inviting" to assist him those who desired to preach reserving to himself the direction and control of the work of those who accepted. The preachers were organized in circuits under an "assistant" who developed the work according to a monthly "plan." In this as in other matters Wesley's strong sense of order placed the ministry of Methodism in a unified, operating system at an early date. Quakerism, due to its rejection of the organized church, did not parallel Methodism in its ultimate development of an ordained ministry.

The administrative structure of both Quaker and Methodist organization has already been outlined. The parallel between them is striking. The local Quaker Meeting met once a month as an administrative meeting. This administrative monthly meeting could include a number of societies. This meeting

19. Ibid., pp. 340-50.

received and "disowned" members and chose elders. Representatives from the Monthly Meetings of a given district formed the Quarterly Meeting, and again representatives from the Quarterly Meetings composed the Yearly Meeting, the highest legislative body of Quakerism. Although it ought to be pointed out that the development of this structure continued in process till well into the eighteenth century. It will be observed at once how closely the administrative structure of Methodism parallels that of Quakerism and that in some cases even the names are similar. There is a close parallel between the early conferences of the Methodists and those of the Quakers, both as to the nature, personnel and purpose. It is significant that Wesley should have adopted the question and answer form for the minutes of his conferences as this was the Quaker method and it is almost certain that Wesley must have been familiar with their practice.

In secondary matters there are also similarities. Both the Quakers and the Methodists stressed plainness of speech, plainness of dress and freedom from ornamentation. In his Advice to the People called Methodists (first published in 1760) Wesley admits adopting both plainness of speech and plainness of dress. He writes,

Many years ago I observed several parts of the Christian practice among the people called Quakers. Two things I particularly remarked among them--plainness of speech and plainness of dress. I willingly adopted

both, with some restrictions, and particularly plainness of dress....I advise you to imitate them, First, in the neatness,....., secondly, in the plainness of their apparel.²⁰

In both of these matters Wesley was highly critical of the Quakers in what he considered to be superficial expressions of what to him were basic matters of ethics. Wesley also possibly learned something from the Quakers in their concern for education, their care of children and the poor.

The differences which existed between the Society of Friends and Wesley's Religious Societies deserve attention. There is no doubt that Wesley developed a warm affection for his Bristol Quaker friends but at all times he retained a clear grasp of the essential differences between Quakerism and the principles which he was seeking to inculcate in his followers.

Two of Wesley's writings analyze in detail these differences. The most important of these was written in 1748 as his reply to the letter of "a person lately joined with the people called Quakers."²¹ Dr. Telford suggests that this letter was written to Thomas Whitehead, who is referred to in Wesley's letter to James Hutton, July 2, 1739.²² In this letter Wesley sets out the differences between Quakerism and

20. JWW, XI, pp. 446-478.

21. JWL, II, pp. 116-28.

22. JWL, I, p. 324.

Christianity, (not Methodism). He bases his case upon an examination of Barclay's An Apology for the Christian Divinity as the same is held forth and preached by the people, in scorn, called Quakers, which was the standard exposition of Quaker beliefs. Wesley deals, first, with the differences in fundamental positions. These are the Scriptures, justification, the ministry, worship, (including the use of praise and of silence), and the sacraments. "In what Robert Barclay teaches concerning the Scriptures, Justification, Baptism and the Lord's Supper lies the main difference between Quakerism and Christianity."²³ Wesley, then, proceeds to deal with less essential matters such as the refusal to use titles, the use of plain language, the wearing of superfluous apparel and the taking of oaths. Wesley clearly says that Quakerism is not Scriptural Christianity and for their treatment of certain matters of conduct he uses the term "egregious trifling." The publication of this letter caused much hard feeling among the Quakers.

A second treatment of the differences between Quakerism and Methodism appeared in Wesley's Farther Appeal II.²⁴ Both writings cover much the same ground. There are other references throughout the course of Wesley's writings such as in his letter to Mary Stokes in 1772 he says, "Go not near the

23. JWL, II, p. 125.

24. JWW, VIII, pp. 184-89.

tents of those formal, dead men called Quakers."²⁵

George Fox's belief regarding the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper provides us with the best illustration of the difference between Quakerism and Methodism. Fox writes in his Journal,

This is a nearer and further advanced state, to be with Christ in the fellowship of His death than only to take bread and wine in remembrance of His death....For outward bread, wine and water are from below, visible and temporal....so the fellowship that stands in the use of bread, wine, water, circumsion, outward temple and things seen, will have an end; but the fellowship which stands in the Gospel, the Power of God, which was before the devil was, and which brings life and immortality to light, by which people may see over the devil that has darkened them, this fellowship is eternal and will stand.....The Apostle told the Corinthians, who were in disorder about water, bread and wine, that he desired to know nothing amongst them but Jesus Christ and Him Crucified.²⁶

To Wesley reasoning of this kind was trifling, Behmenistic and mystical. Wesley, for all his divergences, remained a Churchman and a believer in the visible sacraments.

Wesley-Quaker Associations at Bristol

1739-1741

It is necessary now to examine in detail the known contacts of Wesley with Quakerism. These were mainly at Bristol

25. JWL, V, p. 335.

26. Fox, Journal, p. 342, quoted in Hobhouse, William Law and Eighteenth Century Quakerism, p. 197.

between April 5, 1739 and February 8, 1741.

Wesley's life and work went forward in a succession of influences. His mother was the major influence in his early life. Thomas A. Kempis was the means by which he was "awakened." Jeremy Taylor taught him to live by "method." He learned discipline and fellowship through the instrumentality of the Holy Club. In Georgia his chief interest was the Primitive Church. On board ship, in Georgia and especially, in London and Germany, the Moravians brought pietist influence to bear upon him with important results. A succession of influences caused development, mainly in Wesley's conception of the church. These will be dealt with in the next chapter.

Each period of influence is characterized by a determination to know and profit by all that he can learn by conversation, association, and a careful reading of the literature of the movement or idea with which he is in contact. This applies to the period of Quaker influence. The period may be dated roughly by Wesley's reading as recorded in the Journal. On April 6, 1739, Wesley read a history of the Quakers, likely the two-volume history published in 1722 by Sewell, entitled History of the Rise, Increase, and Progress of the Christian People called Quakers, and on Sunday, February 8, 1741, he read George Fox's Journal, and Curnock inserts the comment "one of the few books read at this period

and noted in the Diary."

The progress of events was as follows: March 31, 1739, Wesley arrived at Bristol in response to Whitefield's request.²⁷ April 2, 1739, Wesley began his open-air preaching.²⁸ April 5, 1739, his audience included a number of Friends.²⁹ April 6, 1739, he read a History of the Quakers.³⁰ April 16, 1739, he "conversed with a Quaker."³¹ April 18, 1739, he baptized Lucretia Smith (late a Quaker).³² April 18, 1739, Lucretia Smith was admitted into the society and "Lucretia Smith was by lot chose leader."³³

The relation of Lucretia Smith and her possible contribution to Methodism deserve some comment. Wesley says she was a Quaker and a gentlewoman. She obviously had gifts, position and a religious background. It would seem that she was first intellectually convinced, and baptized on the strength of that, and that her Methodist conversion came later, on the evening of Wednesday, May 21, 1740. The Journal for December 24 of the same year records that she passed into a condition of spiritual unbelief. Lucretia Smith seems to have continued in the Bristol Society, for in 1788 Wesley

27. JWJ, II, p. 167.

28. Ibid., II, p. 172.

29. JWJ, I, p. 295.

30. JWJ, II, p. 175d.

31. Ibid., II, p. 179d.

32. Ibid., II, p. 180.

33. JWJ, I, p. 300.

refers to her, "Lucretia Smith, (to mention only one instance), a young gentlewoman of our Society here, who found remission of sins long ago and was unblameable in her whole behaviour, reasoned on that question, 'Why does not the God of love make every one as happy as me?' till she lost all her happiness, all her peace, which she never recovered since."³⁴

The significant point, however, is that this Quaker woman became the leader of one of the first Methodist bands. The work in Bristol had been under way some weeks. Wesley arrived March 31, and on April 18 she was made a band leader. There were two bands of married women and three bands of single women as well as several bands of men. It is not clear whether Lucretia Smith became the leader of one of the two bands of married women already formed, or whether she and the other five, admitted at the same time, formed a new band of which she became the leader. The point is that a Quaker woman brought her religious inheritance into the Bristol Society soon after its inception, and continued in a position of leadership for some time.

On the following day, April 19, Wesley "conversed" with Anthony Purver, a Quaker.³⁵ It is not unreasonable to suppose that Mrs. Smith introduced Wesley to Purver and so started the Wesley-Quaker association. Dr. Telford's note to Wesley's

34. JWL, VIII, p. 88.

35. JWJ, II, p. 181.

letter of April 30 to James Hutton tells us something about Purver:

Anthony Purver (1702-77) was a poor school-master at Andover, who spent thirty years in making a new translation of the Bible, but could not get it published. Dr. Fothergill, the Quaker physician, examined and approved the work, gave Purver £1,000 for it, had it printed at his own expense, and revised the sheets. It was issued in two large folio volumes in 1764. Purver married in 1739 Rachel Cotterill, mistress of a girl's boarding-school in Frenchay, and settled there.³⁶

There is also a note on Anthony Purver in the Journal, II, p. 188n.

April 25 Wesley went to Anthony Purver's where he had "dinner," "conversed," "he walked with us," "conversed."³⁷ Wesley was with his host from 1:45 till 4:00 P.M. Wesley held himself to the rule of not conversing for more than one hour unless in matters of great importance. We do not know what they talked about but of his host he wrote, "one of much experience in the ways of God." A reference to Anthony Purver in the Journal for August 12, 1745, speaks of Wesley's disappointment over Purver's translation of the Bible.

On the 1st of May as Wesley preached "many of those who had been long in darkness saw the dawn of a great light." A Quaker who was angry about the effects of Wesley's preaching

36. JWL, I, p. 301.

37. JWJ, p. 183.

was himself struck down and experienced a change of heart. Thursday, May 3, Wesley visited Anthony Purver "with whom was a Dutchman, lately arrived from Ireland, who I verily think, is full of the Spirit, and breathes nothing but Jesus Christ."³⁸ "The Dutchman was probably Garrett Van Hassen,"³⁹ a Quaker itinerant.

On May 5, a conference was held, "by appointment," of six Quakers and Wesley with five of his people.

Six Quakers, three from Ireland, one from the North, and two from Frenchay, met several of us by appointment. We prayed together, and our hearts were much enlarged toward one another.

They were together in conference from twelve noon till 2:00 P.M. He dined at 2:00 P.M., "visited several" and then preached at 4:00 P.M. on a text requested by an unknown correspondent, possibly a Quaker. The text was, "Be still and know that I am God."⁴⁰ This conference raises questions for us. Who desired it? What was the purpose of it? We know that Wesley had been reading on Quakerism. Wesley had taken upon himself the care of souls. He was well aware that ecclesiastical censure would soon overtake him, as it shortly did, and his mind was made up to go forward with the work, which in his judgment had clear evidence of divine approval.

38. JWL, I, p. 306.

39. JWJ, II, p. 188n.

40. JWL, I, p. 307.

As at an earlier time, in Savannah, he had found fellowship and a kind of church community which challenged his thinking because it bore the marks of primitive Christianity, is it unreasonable to conclude that Wesley was again finding encouragement and seeing in Quaker organization the kind of development which his societies might follow?

During the month of May Wesley records being a number of times at Richard Champion's home. Champion was a prominent Bristol Quaker. On May 24 he records, "We breakfasted at Richard Champions where were eight or nine other Quakers. We had a mild conference on justification by faith alone, concluded with prayer, and both met and parted in love."⁴¹ The Journal says that in addition to the fellowship a part of the time was spent on justification by faith alone. This statement is self-explanatory. The point that must be noted, however, is the association. Why was Wesley at Richard Champion's, having breakfast and with a company of Quakers? What was his reason for being there? What benefit was he hoping to give or to receive? The fellowship was a fellowship of love.

A reference in the Diary for April 30 is of significance for Methodism and for Methodist-Quaker relations as well.

41. JWL, I, pp. 316-17.

The entry reads, "I at Mr. Farley's in talk."⁴² Other references follow: June 1, "Mr. Farley, conversed, singing, prayer";⁴³ June 22, "At Mr. Farley's, within."⁴⁴ There are also references for December 19, 1740, when they had tea and sang together, and December 24 of the same year, when others were present and they conversed. The Farleys were printers and Quakers. There were two brothers, Felix and Samuel. Felix Farley became Wesley's Bristol printer. He also became a Methodist although his family retained their Quaker connection. Rev. Frank Baker has this note on the Farleys, "Farley's conversion apparently heightened the tension between him and his elder brother Samuel, who remained a strict Quaker, although Felix also retained close contacts with Bristol Friends, his wife and daughter being members of their society."⁴⁵ The same note refers to the Dyers, another Bristol family in which one brother became a Methodist while the other remained a Quaker.

Farley and Dyer were men of Quaker background who became Methodists and made their contribution to Methodism through personal friendship with Wesley and also, no doubt, through the group-wisdom medium of society, class and band. It could

42. JWJ, II, p. 186.

43. JWJ, II, p. 207.

44. JWJ, II, p. 226.

45. Frank Baker, op. cit., p. 315n.

be claimed that the association between Wesley and Felix Farley was purely of a business nature yet that would not be adequate because Felix Farley became a Methodist, as well as Wesley's printer, and that in the moment of the enthusiastic Bristol fellowship. There is no evidence to prove that Felix Farley made any contribution other than as Wesley's Bristol printer but the correct interpretation would be that this man of influence became a real Methodist and brought his full Quaker background into Bristol Methodism in the most formative years of Wesley's organization. There is nowhere any suggestion on Wesley's part that Felix Farley was a half-hearted or indifferent society and band member. Furthermore Farley could not divest himself of his religious training and knowledge of Quaker organization although he did experience an "evangelical" conversion.

There are other references to Mr. Farley. Those which conclude this period are: December 19, 1740, "at Mr. Farley's tea, singing," and again on December 24, Wesley visited Mr. Farley on business as at "3 tea, corrected; 4:45 Mr. Farley, etc., conversed." A note in the Letters, I, p. 352 says "Wesley's Diary shows that he prepared Serious Considerations on Absolute Predestination, extracted from Robert Barclay in December 1740. It was published by Farley in 1741, 12mo, 24 pp." (Mr. Farley died April 28, 1753.) December 16 Wesley "writ from Barclay" (the Quaker Writer); also on the

17th, 18th, 19th and on the 20th "Ended Barclay."

The period of Quaker association, as recorded in the Journal, ends Feb. 8, 1741 when the Diary records "read George Fox's Journal." Wesley makes no comment at this point. Late in life he said he "hoped that Fox was stark mad when he wrote his Great Mystery."

Charles Wesley also had Quaker contacts during the same period. His recording of these shows that he had no more interest in Quakers, as such, than in any others whom he judged needed salvation or who had found the true faith. Three references will show his attitude. October 31, 1740 he wrote, "I passed an hour with two very wise Quakers, who were for inverting the order of God, and making Christ our sanctification before he is our righteousness. The true Light, I trust, will one day teach them better";⁴⁶ and December 5, 1740, "I was much refreshed in spirit among some of my friends, the Quakers, by a writer of theirs, who strongly insists on the perfect death unto sin, and life unto righteousness which every Christian experiences. Death must precede life, and condemnation justification. This he as clearly teaches, as any of our first Reformers."⁴⁷ May 30, 1741, "I passed an hour with a spiritual Quaker, and rejoiced to find

46. Charles Wesley, Journal, edited by Thomas Jackson.

47. Ibid., p. 263.

we were both of the same religion."⁴⁸

There is one other significant point, that of John Cennick's Quaker ancestry. John Cennick was the first headmaster of Kingswood School. He was Wesley's first lay helper. It is reasonably certain that he was also his first Society Leader at Kingswood, and close associate in the work in Bristol. Cennick went to Bristol, at his own offer and at Wesley's invitation, on June 12, 1739, and continued with Wesley till Christmas, 1740. That John Cennick played a significant part in the work of Methodism at its most formative period is not to be denied. The fact that at the end of 1740 he joined with Whitefield and severed his connection with the Wesleys, and later went with the Moravians, does not deny his place in the inner counsels of the early Methodist circles in Bristol. Cennick says, "Mr. Wesley (although he was desired by many to forbid me) rather encouraged me and we often took sweet counsel together, as friends."⁴⁹ Barclay says John Cennick was a Quaker before he became an associate of Wesley, but does not give any evidence for this statement.⁵⁰ However, John Cennick, himself says:

My father's parents, i.e., my grandfather and grandmother Cennick, were once very

48. Ibid., p. 279.

49. Referred to in JWL, I, p. 355, Preface.

50. Barclay, op. cit., p. 599.

great traders in the clothier's way; and when George Fox and William Penn began preaching, they became Quakers, and in the days of Oliver Cromwell, and in part of King Charles's reign, they suffered "the loss of all things," and were imprisoned in Reading Gaol, and (I have heard my Mother say) were so far reduced, that my grandmother knit or wove half-penny laces for her living, in prison. In several books published by the Quakers of their sufferings, mention is made of them. But my father, after he was married to my mother, was baptized into the Church I was brought up in, and from my infancy carefully instructed by my mother in the principles of religion.⁵¹

In view of this evidence and the fact that in telling his life story, Cennick does not again refer to the Quakers, it would not be wise to endeavour to establish any Methodist debt to Quakerism through Cennick, nor, on the other hand, would it be realistic to overlook that one so significantly placed in the period when Methodism was forming, and in the moment of Wesley's Quaker association would be sympathetic to Quaker ideas and influence. The most that can be affirmed is that Cennick had a Quaker ancestry, that he was present at the formative movement of Methodist organization, and more than likely would be susceptible to Quaker influence.

51. John Cennick, Village Discourses with a Life by the Author (Liverpool, 1840), p. 3.

An Interpretation of the Wesley-Quaker Association at
Bristol, 1739-1741, and the Influence of this
Association on Wesley's Organization

In the history of Methodism sufficient acknowledgment has not been given to the development in organization which took place at Bristol. There has been a tendency to take it for granted that London was the scene of Methodism's original organization. London and Bristol are jointly the location of the rise of Methodist organization. Wesley left London and arrived in Bristol March 31, 1739.

Already in existence in London was the Fetter Lane and other religious societies, bands, band rules, and the love-feast. Methodist societies were not yet in existence. In Bristol, upon his arrival, Wesley found at least two existing religious societies. During the year Wesley formed bands, began to preach in the open-air, built the New Room, founded the Kingswood School, began to use lay helpers and extended the work to Bath and Bradford (Wilts).

On a visit to London toward the end of this memorable year he acquired the Foundery property and organized the "United Societies." It is generally accepted that Methodism took its beginning with the formation of the "United Societies" in London toward the close of 1739. However, Wesley had spent the major part of that year in Bristol and, no doubt, the experience and insight gained there contributed

to the "United Societies" and their origin.

At the end of 1739 Wesley had the "United Societies," the bands, the band rules, the love-feast, open-air preaching, lay helpers, the New Room in Bristol and the Foundery in London. He had also begun to print.

In July 1740 Wesley took the step which brought about the final separation from the Moravians and the Calvinist controversy was already an issue. Watchnight services were first held toward the end of this year.

The year 1741 also saw the same rapid movement of events. Early in the year Methodist doctrine was clarified by the Calvinists separating themselves and becoming the Calvinistic as opposed to the Arminian Methodists. The first major act of Methodist discipline was enforced in connection with this separation. Tickets began to be used and the first stewards were appointed. All this except the separation from the Moravians took place at Bristol.

It was also at Bristol in the beginning of the year 1742 that classes were formed, class leaders appointed and quarterly visitation commenced. Thus it is seen that the majority of the elements of Methodist organization took their formation at Bristol. This is the point which has not been sufficiently recognized especially as London has tended to be accepted as the home of Methodism. London became the home of Methodism at a later date but shared the honors with Bristol in the

beginning.

The next point which must be set forth for recognition is that in the exceedingly fruitful organizational period of 1739-1740 Wesley was in association with the Bristol Quakers. The significance of this association for Methodist organization must be interpreted as Wesley merely records the association but does not admit any indebtedness. However, the association of Wesley and the Bristol Quakers at this significant time cannot be ignored or merely waved aside.

During the period of Wesley-Quaker association field-preaching began, the assistance of lay helpers was adopted, the separation from the Moravians took place, Methodist theology was clarified, discipline was enforced, tickets were given, stewards were appointed, buildings were built and acquired, and the "Methodist Societies" were formed. The writer is not implying that Quaker influence is to be found in all of these but simply indicating the relationship of Quakerism and Early Methodism in time and place.

In fairness, it needs to be pointed out with equal emphasis, that Wesley's association with the Quakers was but a minor part of his activity in Bristol during this period. In addition to his personal and devotional life, his days were filled with society and band meetings, personal evangelism, the supervision of building operations, travel

including periodic visits to London, a heavy correspondence and preparation for printing. Wesley was occupied sixteen hours a day with the work of the Bristol revival.

It is also fair to recognize that within this same period namely between May 25, and June 9, 1739, Wesley records in his Diary that he read History of Puritans.⁵² Dr. Curnock in a note on the same page says this was Daniel Neal's History of the Puritans which was issued 1732-8, in four volumes. Just as there is no comment, at this time, upon his reading of a history of the Quakers so there is no comment on the reading of a history of the Puritans. The comment on the later work is recorded on March 13, 1747, when he read The History of the Puritans again during some more leisurely days at Newcastle.⁵³ Wesley's relation to Dissent is discussed elsewhere in this thesis. Here it can be said that there is no other significant contact with Dissenting views during the Bristol period.

What happened then, when Wesley made his contact with Quakerism at Bristol in 1739-40?

It is reasonable to assume that Wesley had grown up with a childhood prejudice against Quakerism. Samuel Wesley, the father of John Wesley, had declared that "Quakerism is a

52. JWJ, II, pp. 205d and 215d.

53. Ibid., III, pp. 285-6.

compendium of all heresies."⁵⁴ Rev. Frank Baker calls it to our attention that "As a student at Oxford John Wesley compiled a book of anecdotes, including a handful about Quakers, not altogether unfriendly in tone, although one story in particular hints that they were more noteworthy for sharp wits than simple honesty (MS. notebook preserved at Wesley's House, pp. 57-9)."⁵⁵ The same note continued, "In 1733 John strongly urged his elder sister Emilia to throw over the Quaker doctor who was courting her (Stevenson's Wesley Family, 268-70). Emilia herself in 1740 criticized Methodism's emphasis on 'the Quakerly fancies of absolute perfection, &c.' (MS. letter to John, Colman Collection 24)."

On the voyage to Georgia, Wesley after careful instruction baptized the Hird family, who were Quakers.⁵⁶ Two contacts with Quakers are recorded in March 1738, a most significant period in Wesley's life. March 4, 1738, Wesley recorded, "I found my brother at Oxford recovering from his pleurisy: and with him Peter Bohler, by whom (in the hand of the great God) I was on Sunday the 5th, clearly convinced of unbelief, of the want of that faith whereby alone we are saved."⁵⁷ March 14, Wesley recorded, "I called at Altrincham,

54. Tyerman, Samuel Wesley, pp. 183-4.

55. Frank Baker, op. cit., p. 312.

56. JWJ, I, p. 117.

57. JWJ, I, p. 442.

and there lit upon a Quaker, well skilled in, and therefore (as I soon found) sufficiently fond of, controversy. After an hour therein (perhaps not in vain), I advised him to dispute as little as possible; but rather follow after holiness, and walk humbly with his God."⁵⁸ March 21, Wesley recorded, "In the evening we overtook a young man, a Quaker, who afterwards came to us at our inn at Henley, whither he sent for the rest of his family to join with us in prayer; to which I added, as usual, the exposition of the Second Lesson."⁵⁹ Wesley's evangelical conversion came on March 24, 1738, that is, about two months later. The point which concerns us here is that Wesley had had previous contacts with Quakers. We can assume that these contacts did not influence him greatly as he seems to accept for himself the position of teacher and evangelist who will convince the other of the error of his ways.

The Wesley-Quaker associations at Bristol clearly introduce a new element; Wesley was seeking and willing to converse and hold conferences and learn. His first reaction must have been the recognition that his father was unduly prejudiced.

Following this it must have given him food for thought to realize that he himself had arrived at the central, experiential Quaker belief, namely, the immediate contact of

58. Ibid., I, p. 445.

59. Ibid., I, p. 447.

the soul with God. The essence of religion for him had become inward as with the Quakers. He was already becoming convinced that the religious society was a necessity if the character of vital religion was to be maintained. He also had learned the practise of group-wisdom. Wesley must have been impressed at the number of elements of Quaker faith and practice at which he had arrived in his own spiritual pilgrimage. No longer the superior churchman, he was definitely in the position of one who sought fellowship and was eager to learn.

Wesley immediately read a history of the Quaker movement, no doubt loaned to him by one of the Bristol Quakers. He accepted their invitation to fellowship with them and engaged in a conference. The conference was held between Wesley, with five of his new converts and "six Quakers, three from Ireland, one from the North, and two from Frenchay. We prayed together, and our hearts were much enlarged towards one another."⁶⁰

It is safe to assume that some of these, at least, were Quaker itinerants, of the calibre of those already referred to as in Rufus Jones Later Periods of Quakerism. In Wesley's judgment these Quakers were all laymen. But other laymen,

60. JWL, I, p. 307.

both Moravian and Methodist, had impressed Wesley with the gifts for Christian leadership which frequently followed upon Christian experience. Wesley must also have observed the significance of the fact that these men were from different parts, in other words, that they were "itinerants."

Dr. Curnock has a note in the Journal to Wesley's reference in his letter of May 7, 1739, to James Hutton in which he says, "I visited Anthony Purver (a Quaker) at Frenchay, with whom was a Dutchman, lately arrived from Ireland, who, I verily think, is full of the Holy Spirit, and breathes nothing but Jesus Christ."⁶¹ The note says, "The Dutch Quaker was probably Garrett van Hassen. Charles Wesley met him in Dublin, Oct. 7, 1748."⁶² Wesley's Journal for April 13, 1756, said, "I breakfasted with one of the most lovely old men I ever saw; John Garret, a Dutchman by birth, and a speaker among the Quakers."⁶³ Dr. Curnock identifies the unnamed Dutch Quaker of May 2, 1739 and John Garret of April 13, 1756, yet Wesley does not suggest that he had ever met the John Garret of April 13, 1756 on any previous occasion. Wesley does pay tribute to the Christian quality of these Quaker itinerants and admits that he was impressed by their character.

It was less than a month from the date of this conference

61. JWL, I, pp. 306-7.

62. JWJ, II, p. 188n.

63. JWJ, IV, p. 157.

with these Quakers and itinerants that Wesley invited John Cennick to come to Bristol to become the headmaster of the Kingswood school and to act as a kind of general assistant. Cennick almost immediately began to preach and Wesley encouraged him.

In a previous chapter the possible date when Wesley sanctioned a lay ministry for Methodism has been discussed. It can be said here that Wesley's first use of a layman as a regular helper began with his invitation in June 1739 to Cennick to come to Bristol and assist him.⁶⁴ This took place at the time of his association with the Quakers. Whatever the date of his acceptance of Maxfield in London as the first of the "sons in the Gospel" and the "first race" of Methodist preachers (whether in 1740 or early 1741) this followed, as a logical consequence, and only a few months later, upon his meeting with the Quaker itinerants and his invitation to Cennick.

We have already called attention to the elements of Methodist organization which were in existence in April to June 1739. It is possible to recapture the situation as it existed at that moment. Wesley was feeling himself called to an "extraordinary" mission. He was soon to tell the Bishop

64. Supra, Chapter III, The Ministry of Methodism, pp. 161-7.

of Bristol,

Being ordained a priest, by the commission I then received, I am a priest of the church universal; and being ordained as fellow of a college, I was not limited to any particular cure, but have an indeterminate commission to preach the word of God in any part of the Church of England. I conceive not, therefore, that in preaching here by this commission I break any human law. When I am convinced I do, then it will be time to ask, shall I obey God or man? But if I should be convinced in the meanwhile that I could advance the glory of God and the salvation of souls, in any other place more than in Bristol, in that hour, by God's help, I will go hence; which till then I may not do.⁶⁵

Ecclesiastical opposition was certain but Wesley was full of enthusiasm and he, already, had a religious revival on his hands. He was using religious societies and bands, he had commenced open-air preaching, he was about to admit or had recently admitted the use of laymen, he was following, in part, the Moravian pattern but was already in disagreement with the kind of religious community Moravianism was producing. What direction was this religious movement to take? Wesley was, for the first time, in association with a religious organization which followed a principle and sought a pattern totally different from any he had yet known.

In Sewell's History he had read a record of the development of a spiritual society based upon the principle of

65. Tyerman, The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley (London: 1840), I, pp. 246-7.

faith in the Holy Spirit, of heroism under persecution, of a courageous itinerant, lay ministry, of a spiritual movement which sought only to restore the church to its New Testament simplicity and to do all this with a minimum of organization. Did Wesley see the significance of the Quaker connexion of widely-separated religious societies held together by an organizational principle of Holy Spirit government under a leader and the use of a lay itinerancy as the plan for the kind of organization which he must proceed to create?

In order to understand what happened in the Wesley-Quaker association at Bristol in 1739-40 we must return to Wesley's association with the Moravians. Wesley had been closely associated with the Moravians in Georgia and indebted to their fellowship at a time when he was under great emotional strain both in his church relationships and in his own personal life. He also had seen in this American Moravian church what he believed to be the reproduction of the primitive church. The Moravians were the earthly instrument of his conversion. He was emotionally involved with Moravianism, yet he was not in harmony with its central expression nor did the Moravians admit him to Communion with them.

In all of this Wesley was being the destined instrument for dealing with a major issue in the continuity of the Christian church. The two streams of the Continental Reformation, the Reformed and the Anabaptist, were flowing far

apart, and at times in bitter controversy. The Anabaptist stream stressed inner religion. It tended to be mystical, pietistic, separatist, pacifist and anti-clerical. The Reformed stream tended to lose the power of inward religion and to stress the outward and theological, to stress preaching and the objective approach to life. Wesley's struggle with Moravianism was due to the fact that the two streams of the Reformation had met in his own personal experience. There rested with him the choice of direction and emphasis which the next era of English Christianity would take. Wesley's choice was an attempt to combine the two in a new kind of religious movement. The church's debt to Wesley for his strong leadership in this critical issue has never been sufficiently acknowledged.

Wesley had the Christian wisdom to recognize that the difference in approach between the Reformed and Anabaptist emphases is not a matter for division and controversy but for the recognition that the central reality of Christianity is first, inward and of the Spirit, and second, outward, arising from the inward root.

It was at this point that Wesley was involved with Moravianism and the "stillness" controversy. Wesley was convinced that the root of the Christian religion is the inner faith of the heart. He sensed, however, that the organizational principle which the Moravians deduced from this,

namely, the principle of the introverted, religious community separated from the world, was not the New Testament principle. It was the extreme "stillness" teaching of Molther which brought to clear light for Wesley the implication for organization.

The tendency of the churches of the Anabaptist tradition to subjective and separatist religion need not be laboured. We have shown that the Moravians had strong links with this tradition. To a greater or less extent all branches of Christendom following this tradition show similar characteristics. Barclay speaking of the Dutch Mennonites of the seventeenth century says,

They considered themselves a kind of family, sharply separated from the world, in more senses than a purely religious separation, and there existed a positive objection to "admitting strangers" to such a select circle of friends. Preaching the Gospel was restrained to the narrowest limits, and all ideas of church extension being the bounden duty of Christians were condemned.⁶⁶

Wesley's problem was to dissociate the truth of inner religion from a confining organizational principle. This was the real ground of his separation from the Moravians. Wesley abhorred the doctrine of "stillness" for its own sake. He was convinced that it was not true since it was not

66. Barclay, op. cit., p. 607.

scriptural, it denied human initiative, it was negative and therefore neither positive nor creative, it was confining and not expanding. It was a denial of the New Testament direction for human life.

The doctrine of "stillness" also stood in a subtle relationship to organization. It insisted upon a narrowing rather than expanding type of organization. It was not only the question of scriptural reality with which Wesley was concerned, but he sensed the relationship of this wrong organization principle and the "stillness" teaching. It is no mystery why Wesley considered his separation from Moravianism and his entanglement with its false organizational principle to be of such importance for the life of Methodism. Nor was it only the future of Methodism that was at stake but the future history of Christianity.

Methodist-Moravian historians have not enunciated this difference with sufficient clarity. Tyerman implies this but does not develop it at any length. He writes, "By the preaching of the two Wesleys and of Whitefield, a large number of persons in London had been converted; and most of these had been incorporated in the Moravian bands."⁶⁷ (Wesley had no other fellowship in which to care for his converts). Tyerman continues:

67. Tyerman, op. cit., p. 278.

This was the state of things when Wesley began the first Methodist Society in England: He was dissatisfied with his old Moravian friends, and well he might. He had been prominent in the formation of their society at Fetter Lane, on the 1st of May, 1738, but his hopes and aspirations were blighted, and hence he formed another society of his own. Moravian heresies had, in London at least, corrupted the Moravian bands; numbers were offended; these and others repaired to Wesley; Wesley took down their names, and met them every Thursday evening for spiritual advice and prayer; success followed, and the Methodist society was instituted.⁶⁸

A most revealing paragraph appears at this point in Tyerman when he is reporting the Fetter Lane controversy. When Wesley left London thoroughly disgusted with the Fetter Lane situation to return to Bristol (November 21, 1739), at Wycombe, he unexpectedly met Mr. Gambold and Mr. Robson. Their consultation and prayer together resulted in plans for an annual "conference," and a quarterly meeting.⁶⁹ This did not materialize because the rupture with the Moravians parted the persons named. The projected conferences, however, bear out the claim that Wesley was feeling after an expanding type of organization.

The subsequent history of the two religious bodies is perhaps the best proof of the claim made above. It is also interesting to observe that Howell Harris, who did not meet

68. Ibid., I, p. 282.

69. Ibid., p. 281.

the Moravians till some time after 1739, when Wesley had become free of Moravian influence, had a similar type of spiritual conflict to undergo and, after a prolonged illness, took the opposite course to that which Wesley followed, adopting the Moravian principle and founding the Tevecka Community in Wales on the "Herrnhut" lines. It is facts like these which demonstrate the power of Wesley's sense of scriptural perception that, while not seeing the issue in its full significance, he yet retained the central truth of inner religion but freed himself from the narrowing principle of church organization and established his societies on an expanding principle which, when it had time to operate, produced the Methodist Church with its combined characteristics of an insistence on spiritual religion and an expanding polity.

The hypothesis (because it cannot be proved) presented here is that Wesley, in his hour of extreme crisis, saw in the Holy Spirit principle of the Quaker organization and in its lay itinerancy, as the human connexional link through which the principle operated, the very kind of organizational structure that was the answer to his need.

The situation in which Wesley found himself was this: The church of England was repudiating his spiritual leadership, he was finding it a matter of conscience to sever his connection with the Church of England-Moravian Societies which had been his spiritual home, he was feeling the need to

carry forward the development of the societies which he had under his care in Bristol and in London. Hence the question before his mind was upon what organizational principle should he proceed? At the moment of his great need he came into association with the Bristol Quakers. All that can be claimed from the Journal record is that the proferred fellowship was welcome to Wesley and that Wesley-like he exploited it to the full in relation to his pressing need.

The Quaker itinerants impressed him as the Moravian Christian David had earlier impressed him. He rejoiced in the simplicity and richness of their Christian experience; he also observed their effectiveness as religious leaders with the unmistakable New Testament marks of the Spirit.

His letters at this time, to James Hervey tell how ardently he longed for regular clerical assistance. "Oh that he would send you into this part of his harvest!" he wrote to Hervey on August 8, 1739.⁷⁰ To which Hervey replied:

This would I advise my dear Mr. Wesley to act: be content to imitate these primitive (and only not inspired) preachers. Fix in some parish; visit carefully your people; let every individual be the object of your compassionate zeal; in a word, be a living Ouranio. Oh what good might this do to the cause of Christianity!⁷¹

"Besides, I freely own I cannot approve of itinerant

70. JWL, I, p. 331.

71. JWL, I, p. 333.

preaching."⁷² It was evident to Wesley, and with considerable indignation in his breast toward the clergy that no assistance would be forthcoming from that source. Yet the work of the salvation of souls was expanding with frequent invitations calling him further afield. The abundant fruit of his labours convinced him more surely of his "extraordinary" call and supported his determination to develop the work. It was in these very weeks that he had his first close contact with the Quaker, lay, itinerant preachers. If it cannot be proved that this association was the influence which finally persuaded Wesley to use lay preachers, surely no one would argue that it did not play a part in the total chain of circumstances which ultimately provided the Wesleyan Societies with a lay ministry.

The key elements to the Wesleyan movement in its first stage were the meetings, open-air preaching and the itinerant ministry providing a simple connexionalism. It is not possible to present evidence that Wesley drew the inspiration for this simple connexionalism from Quakerism yet the same argument as presented above in connection with Wesley's adoption of a lay ministry can be presented for Wesley's development of a connexional system for Methodism. We have

72. Ibid., I, p. 333.

already endeavoured to show the struggle which Wesley went through in disentangling himself from his involvement with Moravianism. His organizing genius and the New Testament certainly warned him that the confining principle of Moravianism was not the true nature of the New Testament church. At the very moment in which Wesley was wrestling with this problem he came into association with Quakerism. There is no doubt that Wesley saw the Quaker connexional principle in operation. The Quaker societies were individual societies founded upon the basis of the immediate presence and operation of the Holy Spirit. The several societies were united upon the principle of the Holy Spirit. The visible human connexional link was the Quaker itinerants who were laymen and to whose effectiveness Wesley bears testimony.

Wesley who was in revolt against the confining principle of Moravianism must have seen that in the Quaker principle of organization was the instrument which he was needing. At any rate the two features which he adopted at this time were the "United" Societies and the use of a lay and itinerant ministry. One can imagine the light which broke upon Wesley as he saw the relationship between an itinerant lay ministry and the supervision and extension of the Societies. This illumination, at one and the same time, both freed him from the Moravian association and opened before him the unlimited

possibilities of an expanding principle for his religious societies.

There is nothing to indicate that Wesley was drawn to Quakerism as he had been drawn to Moravianism. Wesley was a churchman and familiar with the Quaker rejection of the visible church. Also he was familiar with the way of "illumination" and had rejected it in favour of the way of "evangelical conversion." This does not say, however, that he could not have profited by insight into the nature of Quaker organization and their use of a lay, itinerant ministry. Wesley was hard-pressed and earnestly seeking. He was open also, as usual, to divine inspiration and that through human means, especially, the means of group-fellowship.

It will be asked why did Wesley not acknowledge such an indebtedness. The answer is he did, by faithfully recording the association in his Journal. Secondly, however, it was important that he should not confuse his converts by paying any tribute of indebtedness to Quakerism. Wesley had no use for silence as a medium of religious expression. He also believed firmly in the visible church and sacraments. He was convinced that the experience of the inner light fell far short of a thorough experience of justification followed by sanctification. The many similarities between Wesley's societies and those of the Quakers could easily confuse rather than assist the followers in finding true religious

experience, as he believed it to be. At the outset the relations between the two movements were cordial especially as many Quakers were accepting Methodist conversion. However, when Methodists began to be drawn toward the Quaker fold Wesley taught them the falacies of "Barclay" and in 1748 considered it necessary to set out clearly the differences in the two religious systems. He did this in a long and carefully prepared letter in which he dealt with the "difference between Quakerism and Christianity." The letter was in reply to one received from "a person lately joined with the people called Quakers."

A third reason why Wesley did not acknowledge indebtedness could be that the interpretation came through personal association, group-wisdom and Wesley's own meditation and therefore did not appear to be a clear indebtedness.

In the previous chapter Methodist indebtedness to Quakerism in the development of an intermediate structure has already been established. John Bennett introduced the quarterly meeting of the Quakers into the Methodist circuits in the period, roughly, 1746 to 1749. By doing this he provided the foundation upon which Wesley built the more ecclesiastical type of connexionalism. This is the institution which provided Methodism with its strength and ecclesastical genius. The circuit under the supervision of a superintendent with its quarterly meeting provided the bond which had become a

necessity for the rapidly expanding economy. A simple connexionalism resting in itinerants was no longer adequate. When this stage was urgently necessary John Bennett brought the essentials for it from Quakerism. There can be debate as to the comparative contributions whether of the Quakers or of Wesley and Bennett but of the simple fact there is no doubt.

In conclusion, then, the results can be summarized as follows in this matter of possible indebtedness on the part of Methodist organization to Quakerism. There are three points in English religious history at which it might be discovered that Methodist organization was indebted to Quaker influence. The first of these would be through Quaker influence upon the religious societies of the church of England. The second would be the Wesley-Quaker associations at Bristol in 1739-41. The third was the introduction of the quarterly meeting into Methodism.

As we have already stated in Chapter III, Dr. Simon has thoroughly investigated the religious societies of the Church of England and their roots. The result of his investigation is given in his volume John Wesley and the Religious Societies. He traces the Religious Societies to the year 1680 and the first publication of Dr. Josiah Woodward's Account of the Rise and Progress of the Religious Societies in the City of London, etc.

There is nothing in this brief work to assist the student in tracing the religious societies outside of the Church of England and certainly nothing to suggest that these societies were a product of Quaker influence on the Church of England.

Nevertheless this does not rule out the possibility that documentary evidence may still be found to prove that the religious societies prior to and following the beginning of the eighteenth century were a result of the Quaker movement. Quakerism, through the three decades 1660-80, was one of the most vital forces in the religious life of England. As has been indicated⁷³ many Church of England laymen felt the impact of this powerful movement and were anxious that the church should experience the blessing which they believed would come to them through the use of religious societies.

Such proof, however, would only provide, at best, an indirect indebtedness from Methodism to Quakerism. If any direct indebtedness is to be established, in the first stage, it must be in the brief association of Wesley with the Bristol Quakers in 1739 and the early months of 1740. Since Wesley does not record any indebtedness are we to accept the lack of positive assertion as proof that there was none? The

73. Supra, pp. 124-25.

writer believes that he has given a fair and modest interpretation of this association in suggesting that Methodism owes a debt to Quakerism, in part at least, in the two elements of Methodist organization, namely, in the rise of the lay, itinerant ministry and in the expansive principle of Methodist organization.

As to Methodist indebtedness to Quakerism in the intermediate structure (1746-1749) there is no question whatsoever. There is the possibility at all three points that further investigation will indicate a greater amount of indebtedness.

Finally, we would quote a sentence of Dr. A. W. Harrison's written in September 1911 in the Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society in an article entitled Notes on the Connexional System in which he says, "So it is probable that he (Wesley) was influenced not only by Presbyterian organization but by those of the Dissenters and Quakers, as well as by the familiar usages of the Established Church."⁷⁴

The recognition of Quaker influence on Methodism does two things: it fills in a gap at the most critical moment of the formation of Methodist organization and it provides for the continuity of the stream of the religion of the inner life which had been flowing with varying strength since the

74. W. H. S., Proceedings, VIII (September, 1911), p. 71.

reign of Edward VI and to which the English-speaking world primarily owes its spiritual inheritance and its most treasured conceptions of freedom and truth.⁷⁵

Wesley's organization of the church by 1742 is so far as the general structure and governing principles were concerned. In 1742 there did the development of the church. The obvious development was the expansion and the increased efficiency of operation. However, the more significant development was Wesley's unfolding conception of the nature of the church. It was this which enabled him to pass from the position of a High Church Anglican through the several stages which finally brought him to the place where he took the steps which, following his death, sent Methodism on its way as a new and self-contained branch of Christianity. Each of these steps will be considered in turn.

75. Two contributions have recently been made to the subject of Methodist-Quaker relations. These appeared in the London Quarterly and Holborn Review, October-April 1948-49, and April-July 1950 by Rev. Frank Baker and Rev. John C. Bowman respectively. These articles present the parallel relationships of Methodism and Quakerism throughout the eighteenth century. However, the writer of this thesis has taken pains to point out that since the organization of Methodism crystallized in most of its essential elements in two very brief periods, namely, from Wesley's arrival in Bristol, March 31, 1739 to the formation of classes on February 15, 1742 and the period roughly 1746-49 that therefore any major Quaker influence upon Methodism must be found prior to this latter date. Associations throughout the remainder of the century are interesting but do not stand in the nature of a contribution to the essential structure.

CHAPTER V

THE EXPANSION AND DEVELOPMENT OF WESLEY'S RELIGIOUS SOCIETIES INTO THE METHODIST CHURCH

Wesley's organization was complete by 1749 in so far as its general structure and governing principles were concerned. In what then did the development consist? The obvious development was the expansion and the increased efficiency of operation. However the more significant development was Wesley's unfolding conception of the nature of the church. It was this which enabled him to pass from the position of a High Church Anglican through the several stages which finally brought him to the place where he took the steps which, following his death, sent Methodism on its way as a new and self-contained branch of Christendom. Each of these steps will be considered in turn.

Part I: The Expansion

The expansion of Early Methodism is indicated by the statistics. The 1746 Conference listed Circuits for the first time. These were 9 in number namely, London, with 9 societies in addition to "London itself"; Bristol, with 13 including "Bristol itself"; Cornwall with 9; Ireland with 4; Wales with 4; Staffordshire with 7; Cheshire with 5; Yorkshire with 9; and Newcastle with 10. In 1749 the Circuits were still 9 in number. From 1750 to 1765 no Conference Minutes have been

preserved. In 1751 work was commenced in Scotland. In 1753 the Circuits had increased to 12 and in 1763 to 20. Smith says, "With the Conference of 1765, the Methodist Connexion is presented to our view as a great public religious institution, although it was not then, nor, indeed, long afterwards, in a state of maturity."¹ The circuits had increased to 39; 25 in England, 4 in Scotland, 2 in Wales and 8 in Ireland. There were 92 preachers in all.

In the 1770 Minutes the circuits numbered 50, of which the interesting addition was "No. 50 America." The membership was 29,179. By 1780 the circuits numbered 65 and the membership 43,830, with a distinct Methodist Episcopal Church in America. The figures for the year 1790, which can be taken as the statistics for Methodism at the time of Wesley's death are 216 circuits, 511 preachers and 120,233 members in the British Isles, the West Indies, Canada and the United States. The United States has 97 circuits, 198 preachers and 43,265 members. Thus in the lifetime of the Founder, Early Methodism had grown into a great religious body, taking the world for its parish. As an ecclesiastical system it had developed a remarkable efficiency. Each principle of operation had been contested but during Wesley's lifetime the movement had grown into a smoothly working highly efficient organization.

1. Smith, History of Wesleyan Methodism, I, p. 336.

Following his death a new authority for the government of the organization had to be worked out but in the end the provisions which Wesley had made were accepted in general as the foundation of the Methodist Church.

The Development of the Methodist Societies into the Methodist Church

As has been said the development which made possible the transition from the Methodist Societies into the Methodist Church was the process of illumination by which Wesley was freed from ecclesiastical limitations and enabled to take the steps upon which the Methodist Church became securely founded. That herein lay the real development of Methodism can be seen in the contrast between the attitude between John and Charles Wesley. Had the destiny of Methodism rested with Charles he would have returned the Methodist Societies to the Church of England which would have meant the disappearance of the characteristic features by which Early Methodism lived, such as a lay ministry and field preaching; and ultimately the disappearance of the movement. John Wesley's growing conception of the nature of the church was the real key to the development.

The main point of this chapter needs to be stated at the outset: It is that the central position of Wesley's doctrine of the church did not change throughout his lifetime. The

unfolding of his conception consisted mainly in a change from a belief in tradition to that of Scripture as ultimate authority and in the rejection of episcopacy as of the essence of the New Testament church.

Wesley states the first two-fold essential of the church in the introduction to his sermon on Fasting.

It has been the endeavour of Satan, from the beginning of the world, to put asunder what God hath joined together; to separate inward from outward religion; to set one of these at variance with the other. And herein he has met with no small success among those who were "ignorant of his devices."

Many, in all ages, having a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge, have been strictly attached to the "righteousness of the law," the performance of the outward duties, but in the meantime wholly regardless of inward righteousness, "the righteousness which is of God by faith." And many have run into the opposite extreme, disregarding all outward duties, perhaps even "speaking evil of the law, and judging the law," so far as it enjoins the performance of them.

2. It is by this very device of Satan, that faith and works have been so often set at variance with each other....

3. In the same manner have the end and means of religion been set at variance with each other....²

Wesley's contribution was to unite the two streams of inward and outward religion which had been so bitterly in conflict. However, he did this by returning to the source

2. The Standard Sermons of John Wesley, edited by Sugden, I, pp. 449-50.

of all religion. The source was the inner life of God in the soul.³

The seat of true religion was first inward and spiritual. The outward was a result of the inward. Thus inner religion was the root of the visible and the invisible church. The invisible church became the visible church in the living community. Nor is this to say that the visible institutions were secondary. The visible and the invisible church was something which "God had joined together." This conception which was at the root of Wesley's thinking remained with him all his days.

This truth came to him early, how early we cannot say. It can be traced to his father, in part, "To John he said: 'The inward witness, son; the inward witness! That is the strongest proof of Christianity.'"⁴ It is possible that the central truth of Quakerism had penetrated English thought more deeply than has been realized. Wesley tells us that he began to change his life when about twenty-two years of age. Subsequent events strengthened his sense of inward religion.

One of the significant things about this central belief

3. One of Wesley's earliest publications (1744) was The Life of God in the Soul of Man or the Nature and Excellence of the Christian Religion extracted from a work of Rev. Henry Scougal by the same title.

4. Burns, Revivals Their Laws and Leaders (New York: n.d.), p. 274.

was that it placed Wesley in the succession in English history of those who had known and practised the religion of the Spirit.

Another aspect of the nature of the church held by Wesley came to him as part of his earliest inheritance and from it he never departed. This was his conception of the church as the mystical body of Christ. He looked upon the church as God's gift to mankind. God in Christ was its source and ever-present essence. The ministry and the sacraments were of God. All men were called to be stewards of the divine mysteries and certain men were particularly called. Dr. J. E. Rattenbury's recent study of The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley (1948) is a major contribution in the restoration of Wesley's doctrine of the church. The eighteenth century historians had presented mainly the evangelical churchman. It will take some time for this restored truth and its great significance to become a reality for Methodism and Christendom.

For Wesley however the truth of the mystical body and that of the inner root of religion were not two separate truths but two aspects of the spiritual essence of the church. Further, his evangelical emphasis, the main presentation of eighteenth century Methodism, was simply another aspect of the same truth. The outward and visible church was the expression of the inner and spiritual reality of religion.

Furthermore, the church was not only the body of Christ but the witnessing community of the faith, and the witness was a requisite mark of the living body.

1725-1738

Wesley was an eighteenth century High Church Anglican with the background of the Epworth Rectory. Dr. J. E. Rattenbury writes, "When, for instance, John Wesley wrote that he was a 'High-Churchman and the son of a High-Churchman,' he did not mean that in the modern sense of the term he was a 'High-Churchman'--an Anglo-Catholic of our own times. His use of the term 'high' was political rather than ecclesiastical."⁵

The fact that Wesley became spiritually awake was significant considering the general atmosphere of that age. It is also significant that he was moved by missionary sentiments before the great evangelical missionary age was born.

The passion of Wesley's life gradually came to be the restoration of the church to its original, living spirituality. The Holy Club in Oxford and his life and study in Georgia contributed to this end.

The Moravians confirmed his growing theories about the character of the church. He attended the ordination service

5. J. Ernest Rattenbury, The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley (London: 1948), p. 3.

of a Moravian bishop in Georgia in which he saw a reproduction of the original Christian church.

After several hours spent in conference and prayer, they proceeded to the election and ordination of a bishop. The great simplicity, as well as solemnity, of the whole, almost made me forget the seventeen hundred years between, and imagine myself in one of those assemblies where form and state were not, but Paul the tent-maker or Peter the fisherman presided, yet with the demonstration of the spirit and of power.⁶

This quotation is highly significant since it contains so many of the elements for which Wesley was to contend, namely, the living body of Christ, inward and spiritual religion, simplicity, the non-ecclesiastical character of the church, the real point of difference between lay and ordained Christians and the element of fellowship.

Thus the major pre-occupation of Wesley's life, namely, his concern with the church as holiness and the power of godliness was already his central passion. He strove for this end with every means at his disposal and brought into being what was in his judgment a true New Testament church. He guarded this religion community on the one hand from every false variety of mysticism and lawlessness and, on the other, from an over-emphasis on ecclesiasticism whether in institutions, theology or worship.

6. JWJ, I, pp. 170-1.

One point needs to be stated before proceeding further. Wesley's development proceeded by the intellectual grasp of a position, a kind of insight, followed by a process of the assimilation of the truth concerned and eventually this led to action. It also needs to be pointed out that Wesley had a way of writing in after years as though the intellectual conviction had matured in reality at the time of his first insight. It can be said that every outstanding position in Wesley's unfolding conception came only after a process of assimilation had brought him to a matured conviction.

1738-1739

Wesley's conversion in 1738 and his surrender to open air preaching in 1739 were the means of a further unfolding of this central emphasis. These moments in which his heart was strangely warmed and the shame of the Cross was accepted provided him with the experience of New Testament faith. He now knew grace, forgiveness and assurance as inward experience.

In this same period Scripture became for him a sole and final authority. In 1765 he wrote, "In 1730 I began to be homo unius libri, to study (comparatively) no book but the Bible." However, 1739 is the most likely moment in this transition because it was in that year that he wrote, "I allow no other rule, whether of faith or practice, than the Holy

Scripture."⁷

Wesley's acceptance of this position is of the greatest importance for all that followed. The Roman Church rests its authority in tradition, what Wesley called "antiquity." The Church of England following the Reformation held to tradition as its authority but with some reference to Scripture. The dividing line for Cartwright in England and the Continental Reformers came at the point of their rejection of tradition or tradition plus Scripture and their acceptance of Scripture as the final authority. At this point a major dividing line appeared in Christendom.

Associated with Wesley's conversion was his acceptance of Scripture as final authority and both were associated with what later came to be known as his evangelical emphasis. He rejected nothing in his grasp of the inward and spiritual character of religion but added to it the warmth of evangelical experience and the foundation of Scriptural authority.⁸

In the years immediately following 1738 many things were being proved to Wesley's satisfaction by experimental religion. His doctrine of the church was being hammered out in daily experience. Religious conversions, the effect of the proclamation of free grace, the value of fellowship, the effectiveness

7. *Supra*, p. 85.

8. Rattenbury, *op. cit.*, p. 89; JWL II, pp. 312-388; JWL, I, p. 274.

of consecrated laymen, the use of method, contact with other religious bodies and many other factors were not only convincing his reason but laying upon him a passion for spreading Scriptural holiness. His vision of the true church was steadily clarifying itself.

Associated with the changes which took place from 1738 onwards was another of less significance but of major importance for the development of Methodism. Wesley had come to the belief that offices in the church rested in gifts rather than orders. In this conviction he was on Continental Reformation ground.⁹ He was observing daily the greater effectiveness in some of his own lay preachers than in the highest orders of Anglicanism.

There was another significant addition to Wesley's unfolding conception of the church. This also resulted from New Testament study and practical experience. To the three traditionally-accepted means of grace, namely, prayer, the Scriptures and worship Wesley added "fellowship" as a fourth. The conviction that the New Testament Church was a community, a fellowship of believers, and the experience in practise that fellowship was essential to spiritual growth had been settled for him. Lest there might be error on this point he definitely experimented in his care of souls with some whom he nurtured

9. Supra, p. 29.

in the regular means of grace plus fellowship and some whom he nurtured in the regular means of grace only. The results proved to his satisfaction that fellowship was an essential means of grace. It was more than a means of grace, it was of the very essence of the living body.

1744-1745

Wesley wrote a definition of the church into the Minutes of the first Conference (1744), "What is the Church of England?" to which the answer is given: "According to the Twentieth Article, the visible Church of England is the congregation of English believers, in which the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments duly administered."

The next year he wrote to Westley Hall, his brother-in-law, a considered statement of his position at that time,

You think, first, that we undertake to defend some things which are not defensible by the Word of God, You instance in three; on each of which we will explain ourselves as clearly as we can.

1. "That the validity of our ministry depends on a succession supposed to be from the Apostles, and a commission derived from the Pope of Rome and his successors or dependents."

We believe it would not be right for us to administer either baptism or the Lord's supper unless we had a commission so to do from those bishops whom we apprehend to be in a succession from the Apostles. And yet we allow these bishops are the successors of those who were dependent on the Bishop of Rome.

But we would be glad to know on what reasons you believe this to be inconsistent

with the Word of God.

2. "That there is an outward priesthood, and consequently an outward sacrifice, ordained and offered by the Bishop of Rome, and his successors or dependents, in the Church of England, as vicars and vicegerents of Christ,"

We believe there is, and always was, in every Christian Church (whether dependent on the Bishop of Rome or not), an outward priesthood, ordained of Jesus Christ, and an outward sacrifice offered therein, by men authorized to act as ambassadors of the mysteries of God.

On what grounds do you believe that Christ has abolished that priesthood or sacrifice?

3. "That this Papal hierarchy and prelacy, which still continues in the Church of England, is of apostolical institution, and authorized thereby, though not by the written Word."

We believe that the threefold order of ministers (which you seem to mean by Papal hierarchy and prelacy) is not only authorized by its apostolical institution, but also by the written Word.

Yet we are willing to hear and weigh whatever reasons induce you to believe to the contrary.

You think, secondly, "that we ourselves give up some things as indefensible, which are defended by the same law and authority that establishes the things above mentioned; such as are many of the laws, customs, and practices of the Ecclesiastical Courts."

We allow (1) that those laws, customs, and practices are really indefensible; (2) that there are Acts of Parliament in defence of them, and also of the threefold order.

But will you show us how it follows, either (1) that those things and these stand or fall together? or (2) that we cannot sincerely plead for the one, though we give up the other?

Do you not here quite overlook one circumstance, which might be a key to our whole behaviour--namely, that we no more look upon those filthy abuses which adhere to our Church as part of the building than we look upon any filth which may adhere to the walls of Westminster Abbey as a part of that structure?

You think, thirdly, "that there are other things which we defend and practise, in open

contradiction to the orders of the Church of England." And this you judge to be a just exception against the sincerity of our professions to adhere to it.

Compare what we profess with what we practise, and you will possibly be of another judgement.

We profess (1) that we will obey all the laws of that Church (such we allow the Rubrics to be, but not the customs of the Ecclesiastical Courts) so far as we can with a safe conscience: (2) that we will obey, with the same restriction, the bishops as executors of those laws; but their bare will, distinct from those laws, we do not profess to obey at all."¹⁰

Dr. Curnock has a note in the Journal where the letter is quoted, which reads as follows,

This is probably the last formal statement of Wesley's original position with reference to Apostolical Succession. Twenty-one days later, on his journey from London to Bristol, he read Lord King's book, published in 1691, An Inquiry into the Constitution, Discipline, Unity, and Worship of the Primitive Church, that flourished three hundred years after Christ; faithfully collected out of the extant writings of those ages. It cannot be denied that from this time Wesley's views on ecclesiastical polity were slowly, perhaps, but seriously modified. He did not become a Dissenter, nor did he lose his affection for the Church of England. Both his enemies and admirers have quoted words and deeds of his, during the long transition period, that seem to justify the charge of inconsistency; but it was the inconsistency of a man emerging out of darkness into light, and who saw men as trees walking. The subject is too intricate for treatment in the brief annotations of this work. It is possible to indicate critical points in the process of development, and, by

10. JWL, II, pp. 55-6.

reference, to direct students to reliable sources of information. Wesley's own view may be gathered from the early Minutes of Conference, 1744, 1745, 1747 (see John Bennet's copy of the Minutes published by the W.H.S. 1896); for his publications during this period: A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, i. ii. iii. (1745); his Letters to the Rev. Mr. Church; and Hymns on the Lord's Supper, with a preface concerning the Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice extracted from Dr. Brevint. Dr. Rigg's Living Wesley, and especially his Churchmanship of John Wesley, will be helpful. See also Telford's Life of Wesley, pp. 302-14, and J. Robinson Gregory's Student's History of Methodism, vol. I, pp. 148-54.

Dr. Telford has a preface to this letter in the Letters in which he wrote, "Wesley still held his High Church views as to the succession and the 'outward sacrifice' offered. Three weeks later Lord King's Account of the Primitive Church led him to change his view (Journal, III, 232). See letters of August 18, 1743, and December 22, 1747."¹¹

Dr. Ernest Rattenbury writes,

No reference, however, was made in the Journal to a change of view on the priesthood and the Christian sacrifice, but only of apostolic succession. Nor, so far as I can discover, was any such renunciation ever made.

While John Wesley's conclusion that episcopal succession from the Apostles was an undemonstrable fable does involve also a renunciation of the belief with which he prefaced his letter of 30th December 1745, and by consequence of his belief in the three orders, it does not involve a repudiation of his belief

11. JWL, II, p. 54.

in the outward sacrifice and outward priesthood, nor is there the least evidence that he ever repudiated these beliefs. Other evidences so far as they can be traced make for a contrary conclusion....I challenged Mr. Telford on this note, but he could not give me any definite case of general retraction by Wesley of his High Church views....The fact that John Wesley changed his mind on episcopal succession cannot be made to prove that he changed his mind in relation to all other matters that modern Methodists think it would have been consistent for him to have done. The inference is purely subjective. As a matter of fact, though Wesley renounced episcopal succession he never did renounce all succession. In some sense he evidently believed that the orders that he received were orders that, as a Presbyter, he could transmit, and apparently held that ordination must be from a man who had received orders and therefore had a right to pass them on to other men.¹²

Dr. Rattenbury's position is highly important and the real significance of it came at a much later time in Wesley's life.

1746

Wesley records in the Journal for January 20th, 1746,

I set out for Bristol. On the road I read over Lord King's Account of the Primitive Church. In spite of the vehement prejudice of my education, I was ready to believe that this was a fair and impartial draught; but, if so, it would follow that bishops and presbyters are (essentially) of one order, and that originally every Christian congregation was a church independent on all others.¹³

12. Rattenbury, op. cit., pp. 84-86.

13. JWJ, III, p. 232.

Thus 1746 marks the second major change in Wesley's conception of the nature of the church. He came to believe that presbyters constituted the one and only order within the church and that through presbyters the continuity of the church was maintained. The ultimate effect of this change did not come till long afterwards.

Wesley was ready for the revelation and deliverance which came to him through the reading of Lord King's work. His fundamental conception of the church did not change but to know that episcopacy was not of the essence of the church provided him with a new freedom. The continuity of the church rested with presbyters rather than with bishops. He himself was "a Scriptural episcopos as much as any man."

Dr. Eayrs has a note in his work Wesley Christian Philosopher and Church Founder in which he says,

The Methodist Churches, or Demoninations, conform generally to the Presbyterian type of polity. The fissiparous tendency which appeared among the Methodists in Wesley's lifetime, and several times since, resulted in the creation of further Methodist Churches, which followed the Presbyterian type with varying degrees of closeness. Strict Episcopalianism or Congregationalism has had little attraction for Methodists. The large Methodist Episcopal Churches or Connexions of America are not hierarchical nor prelatical in their ministry. They are presbyterial, and susceptible of popular influence. It was recognized as natural that in the constitution of the new United Church of Canada (1925), composed of Presbyterian,

Methodist, and Congregational Churches, Presbyterian polity predominated, along with the doctrine of evangelical Arminianism, which Wesley gave afresh to the world.¹⁴

Wesley's acceptance of presbyters as the means of the continuity of the church did not in any sense mean the acceptance of Presbyterianism as he knew it.

The points in this connection can only be summarized. Wesley was a bitter foe of Dissent. He had no use for Presbyterianism. He hated Calvinism for reasons that we have seen and his judgment that "all the devices of Satan, for these fifty years, have done far less toward stopping this work of God, than that single doctrine" is well known.

Presbyterianism functions upon the theory of the parity of presbyters. Wesley had no use for any theory of parity in church government. Two things he would not allow the one that any man should remain in a religious office once his zeal had cooled, the other, that the work of God should be allowed to rest. Parity, for Wesley meant and time has proved him to have been correct, that no single individual could be entrusted with the responsibility of pressing on the work. The New Testament office of overseer was not to be stultified with any non-Scriptural theory of parity. His answer was the office of superintendent. There was no place in his thinking for a

14. Eayrs, op. cit., p. 275.

Presbyterian presbytery as such.

Wesley also objected to the office of elder. He has left on record his practical objections to the Scottish eldership and the kirk-session. His letter to Jonathan Crowther May 10th, 1789 is well known, "'Sessions!' 'Elders!'" We Methodists have no such customs, neither any of the Churches of God that are under my care. I require you, Jonathan Crowther, immediately to disband that session (so called) at Glasgow."

Deeper than prejudice, however, was the fact that Wesley did not believe the Presbyterian office of elder was a correct interpretation of the New Testament eldership. He was well aware of all the controversy which had raged around this office in the previous century. The office of superintendent or what the Southern Methodist Episcopal Church called Presiding Elder came nearer to his reading of Scripture. In 1746 even with his enlightenment he had no other thought for his religious societies than as a supplement to the Church of England with the objective of spreading Scriptural holiness.

1747

The 1747 Minutes show that Wesley's mind was moving in a number of directions. The following is the section on discipline,

- Q. 1. What is schism in the Scripture sense of the word?

- A. The word only occurs twice in the New Testament: I Cor. I:10,.....and XII 25
In both these places the word undeniably means (which consequently is the true and spiritual notion of schism) a causeless breach, rupture or division, made amongst the members of Christ, among those who are the living body of Christ, and members in particular.
- Q. 2. Are not the Methodists guilty of making such a schism?
- A. No more than rebellion or murder. They do not divide themselves at all from the living body of Christ. Let any prove it, if they can.
- Q. 3. But do not they divide themselves from the Church of England?
- A. No: they hold communion therewith now in the same manner as they did 20 years ago, and hope to do so until their lives' end.
- Q. 4. You profess to obey the governors and rules of the Church, yet in many instances you do not obey them. How is this consistent? Upon what principles do you act, while you sometimes obey and sometimes not?
- A. It is entirely consistent. We act at all times on one plain, uniform principle,--
 "We will obey the rules and governors of the Church, whence we can consistently with our duty to God; whenever we cannot, we will quietly obey God rather than men."
- Q. 5. But why do you say you are thrust out of the Church? Has not every minister a right to dispose of his own church?
- A. He ought to have, but in fact he has not. A minister desires I should preach in his church, but the Bishop forbids him. That Bishop then injures him, and thrusts me out of that church.
- Q. 6. Does a church in the New Testament always mean "a single congregation"?
- A. We believe it does. We do not recollect any instance to the contrary.
- Q. 7. What instance or ground is there in the New Testament for a national church?
- A. We know none at all. We apprehend it to be a mere political institution.

- Q. 8. Are there three orders of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons plainly described in the New Testament?
- A. We think they are, and believe they generally obtained in the churches of the Apostolic age.
- Q. 9. But are you assured, God designed the same plan should obtain in all churches throughout the ages?
- A. We are not assured of this, because we do not know that it is asserted in Holy Writ.
- Q. 10. If this plan were essential to a Christian Church what must become of all the foreign Reformed Churches?
- A. It would follow, they are no parts of the Church of Christ,--a consequence full of shocking absurdity.
- Q. 11. In what age was the divine right of episcopacy first asserted in England?
- A. About the middle of Queen Elizabeth's reign. Till then all Bishops and Clergy in England continually allowed and joined in the ministrations of those who were not episcopally ordained.
- Q. 12. Must there not be numberless accidental varieties (variations) in the government of various churches?
- A. There must in the nature of things. As God variously dispenses His gifts of nature, providence and grace, both the offices themselves and the officers in each ought to be varied from time to time.
- Q. 13. Why is it that there is no determinate plan of Church-government appointed in Scripture?
- A. Without doubt, because the wisdom of God had a regard to this necessary variety.
- Q. 14. Was there any thought of uniformity in the government of all the churches until the time of Constantine?
- A. It is certain there was not, and would not have been had men consulted the word of God only.¹⁵

15. Minutes 1747 (John Bennett's copy) W.H.S., pp. 47-48.

There are many ideas which could be considered here which give light on Wesley's unfolding conception of the church. However, there is no change in his fundamental concept. The church is "those who are the living body of Christ."

1749-1755

The year 1749 is the year in which virtually the entire working economy of Methodism was completed. The "union of all the societies," with assistants and quarterly meetings made the structure complete. From this time the functioning of the economy and its expansion was the main organizational task.

Charles Wesley saw that the Methodist Societies had become a self-contained church with the exception only of ordination for its ministry and the administering of the Sacraments. This is no doubt then the reason why at the end of the 1749 Conference he got John Wesley to sign a written agreement that he would not separate from the Church of England. Again in 1755 when the separation issue was at its height he and John took a vow together that they would not separate from the Church. 1755 was the year in which Wesley decided that it was "lawful but not expedient" to separate.

The relation of Charles Wesley to his brother's developing doctrine of the Church and subsequent action requires some attention as it was a contributing factor.

Charles Wesley was the early evangelist and hymn-writer of Methodism although it is more than likely some of the credit for the hymns should go to John. But Charles was an over-zealous Church of England Methodist.

The relationship of Charles Wesley to his brother is significant not only because Charles was a restraining influence but for the light which that relationship throws upon the manner in which John made major decisions.

From the days of the Holy Club Wesley had felt himself committed in a spiritual bond. He was a believer in Holy Spirit guidance and one means of such guidance was the group-wisdom of an intimate society in which thoughts were shared, temptations confessed and all members were held to group-decision in all major matters. Wesley's freedom to go to Bristol at Whitefield's invitation was a group-decision. Wesley believed in and felt the need for such a fellowship.

Charles Wesley understood this and used it to bind his brother against the possibility of separation from the Church of England. He misused this bond greatly when receiving John's confidence about the proposed marriage to Grace Murray and arranged her marriage to John Bennett. Charles' failure was a great blow to Wesley. However, he honoured his agreement with Charles that he would not separate his Societies from the Church. Thus Charles Wesley was even more than a restraining influence on the development of Early Methodism.

Wesley summed up his disappointment on this whole matter when in 1785 he wrote a reproach to Charles, "Perhaps if you had kept close to me, I might have done better."

1756

Wesley's letter to James Clark in 1756 indicates his arrival at a settled position.

As to my own judgement, I still believe 'the Episcopal form of Church government to be both scriptural and apostolical'; I mean, well agreeing with the practice and writings of the Apostles. But that it is prescribed in Scripture I do not believe. This opinion (which I once heartily espoused) I have been heartily ashamed of ever since I read Dr. Stillingfleet's Irenicon. I think he has unanswerably proved that neither Christ or His Apostles prescribed any particular form of Church government, and that the plea for the divine right of Episcopacy was never heard of in the primitive church.¹⁶

It is true that in the 1747 Minutes Wesley asked the question, "Why is it that there is no determinate plan of church-government in Scripture?" and replied, "Without doubt the wisdom of God had regard to this necessary variety" but as usual it took some years for the idea to become a firm conviction.

1767

December 1, 1767 Wesley concluded an entry in his Journal

16. JWL, III, p. 182.

the conclusion "He that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." Bishop McConnell interprets this entry as the moment of the completion of Wesley's unfolding doctrine of the church and his acceptance of the instrumental conception of the church.¹⁷ In addition he argues that this was the moment of Wesley's separation from the Church of England. He writes, "Lord Acton says that this date rather than 1784 marks the separation of Methodism from the Church of England. If the entry of Wesley has this significance, it has more, for, taken in its full implication, it means the secondary nature of any church organization whatsoever."¹⁸

Wesley's position as to the nature of the church was stated at the beginning of this section. The core of his belief was that the church was inward, spiritual, the mystical body, what he called in the 1747 Minutes "the living body of Christ." At no time in his life did he change his belief on this. His unfolding came primarily as a deliverance from the idea of the divine right of episcopacy. This did not touch the root of his church position. Wesley, being Wesley, was incapable of holding the instrumental doctrine of the church.

Wesley believed the church in its invisible and visible

17. McConnell, op. cit., pp. 167-188.

18. Ibid., p. 168.

essence was delivered from God to men through Jesus Christ. The sacraments are, as he quoted Brevint, by special order from God Himself. Its institutions are divinely appointed but not determined by Scripture in detail but vary according to varied necessity. The Church was not "something" plus an instrument but rather the "something" and the "instrument" were the same. "A man who lives and dies in error or in dissent from our church may yet be saved; but a man who lives and dies in sin must perish."¹⁹ "He that feareth God" is the inner livingness "and worketh righteousness" is the outward expression of inward faith. Wesley was horrified at the idea of a Methodist using the title of "bishop." He would have been horrified beyond measure at a Methodist bishop attributing to him the holding of the instrumental doctrine of the Church. The Church for Wesley was the living body of Christ.

1773

In 1773 it was clearly Wesley's desire to continue the existing relationship of the Methodist Societies with the Church of England. He wrote Fletcher asking him to associate himself full-time with the intention of becoming his successor. "Thou art the man," he wrote. Fletcher declined. He knew there was no possibility of Wesley's "power" being

19. JWL, III, p. 183.

transferred to another. Hence, since no successor was available and to separate was lawful the other alternative began to press upon Wesley's mind. The Methodist Societies had become a distinctive self-functioning body with a doctrine, discipline, ministry and property of their own. For a variety of reasons it was evident to him that their identity should be safeguarded. Some provision, which would allow the transference of his power and secure the legal settlement was necessary.

1784

1784 is the momentous year of Methodist history. The Deed of Declaration²⁰ was drawn up February 28th and registered March 9 of that year. On September 1st Wesley ordained²¹ and on September 10th he wrote the American letter²² authorizing a Methodist Church in the United States.

The Deed of Declaration provided that Wesley's "power" and all the appurtenances of the Wesleyan Societies should pass at his death to a legal Conference consisting of one hundred of his preachers whom he named in the document. Thus the legal succession was provided for.

There remained the question of the real continuity of

20. Appendix IV.

21. JWJ, VII, p. 15.

22. Appendix III.

Methodism within the historical church. The question was in effect, how could that which was not a church become a church?

For Wesley this continuity was essential. Anglican bishops refused to ordain and provide the continuity. The answer was found in the doctrine of the church at which Wesley had arrived.

He believed God had given the church through Jesus Christ. Religion was inward, of the mysteries of God and took the form of the living community. Ordination was the act by which the church was transmitted. The sacraments and their administration, by properly ordained ministrants, were at the very heart of the church. Wesley proceeded to ordain in order that Methodism might be not only a New Testament Church but also a true church in the historical succession. In 1785 he replied to Charles Wesley, who had objected to the ordinations, and gave a very clear statement of his conception of the church at the time of the first ordinations. A careful reading of this letter will also reveal a remarkable consistency in Wesley's words and actions throughout his lifetime when viewed in the light of his deepest thinking about the Church.

Dr. Telford prefaces the letter with the following,

Charles Wesley had written on August 14 to say he had been reading over again his brother's Reasons against a Separation (printed in 1758), and his Works, and entreated him to read them again himself. Charles says: "When once you began ordaining in America, I knew, and you knew, that your preachers here would

never rest till you ordained them." See Jackson's Charles Wesley, ii, 394.

Plymouth Dock, August 19, 1785

Dear Brother,--I will tell you my thoughts with all simplicity, and wait for better information. If you agree with me, well; if not, we can (as Mr. Whitehead used to say) agree to disagree.

For these forty years I have been in doubt concerning that question, "What obedience is due to 'heathenish priests and mitred infidels'?" I have from time to time proposed my doubts to the most pious and sensible clergymen I knew. But they gave me no satisfaction; rather they seemed to be puzzled as well as me.

Some obedience I always paid to the bishops in obedience to the laws of the land. But I cannot see that I am under any obligation to obey them further than those laws require.

It is in obedience to those laws that I have never exercised in England the power I believe God has given me. I firmly believe I am a scriptural episcopos as much as any man in England or in Europe; for the uninterrupted succession I know to be a fable, which no man ever did or can prove. But this does in no wise interfere with my remaining in the Church of England; from which I have no more desire to separate than I had fifty years ago. I still attend all the ordinances of the Church at all opportunities; and I constantly and earnestly desire all that are connected with me so to do. When Mr. Smyth pressed me to "separate from the Church," he meant, "Go to church no more." And this was what I meant seven-and-twenty years ago when I persuaded our brethren "not to separate from the Church."

But here another question occurs: "What is the Church of England?" "It is not 'all the people of England.' Papists and Dissenters are no part thereof. It is not all the people of England except Papists and Dissenters. Then we should have a glorious Church indeed! No; according to our Twentieth Article, a particular Church is 'a congregation of faithful people' (coetus credentium, the words in

our Latin edition), "among whom the word of God is preached and the sacraments duly administered." Here is a truly logical definition, containing both the essence and the properties of a Church. What, then, according to this definition, is the Church of England? Does it mean "all the believers in England (except the Papists and Dissenters) who have the word of God and the sacraments duly administered among them"? I fear this does not come up to your idea of "the Church of England." Well, what more do you include in that phrase? "Why, all the believers that adhere to the doctrine and discipline established by the Convocation under Queen Elizabeth." Nay, that discipline is well nigh vanished away, and the doctrine both you and I adhere to. I do not mean I will never ordain any while I am in England, but not to use the power they received while in England.

All those reasons against a separation from the Church in this sense I subscribe to still. What, then, are you frightened at? I no more separate from it now than I did in the year 1758. I submit still (though sometimes with a doubting conscience) to "mitred infidels." I do, indeed, vary from them in some points of doctrine and in some points of discipline by preaching abroad, for instance, by praying extempore, and by forming societies; but not an hair's breadth than I believe to be meet, right, and my bounden duty. I walk still by the same rule I have done for between forty and fifty years. I do nothing rashly. It is not likely I should. The high-day of my blood is over. If you will go hand in hand with me, do. But do not hinder me if you will not help. Perhaps, if you had kept close to me, I might have done better. However, with or without help, I creep on. And as I have been hitherto, so I trust I shall always be,

Your affectionate friend and Brother.

It was the circumstances of the American situation which clarified Wesley's mind and brought him to decision, and the performance of the act in which Methodism became a church

(denomination) in its own right.

America was no longer British territory and therefore beyond the authority of the legal Church of England. This is the first proposition stated in the American letter. "My scruples are at an end" he wrote. The legal aspect was clear. He was satisfied as to his "right to ordain." The situation would not allow further delay. The church which was to come into existence at his death must have the continuity of the divinely-given church. Professor A. Raymond George describes events as follows,

In 1784 Wesley at last took the decisive step. In February he proposed to Coke that he should ordain him as Superintendent (Etheridge, Life of Thomas Coke, 100 based on Drew, Life, 62): this rebuts the suggestion that Wesley was forced into it in his old age by the ambitious importunity of Coke. Coke at first demurred. Wesley laid the matter before the Conference at Leeds, which was decisively opposed to it (Tyerman, III, 428. The Conference opposed ordination, though they agreed to send preachers to America. What is the source of the statement in Smith, I, 511, that some ministers at Leeds agreed that some should go to America to ordain?). But on the 9th August Coke, who had been studying partistic precedents, wrote strongly in favour of it (Whitehead, Life of Wesley, II, 415-17, who says: "This letter affords matter for several observations, both of the serious and comic kind."). This letter refers neither to "Bishop" nor "Superintendent," but to "the power of ordaining others." Reading between the lines, we seem to see that he was determined to have some power which would be useful to him in dealing with Asbury.

Accordingly, Wesley, on 1st September

at 4 a.m. in a private house in Bristol (Proc. II, 99-110.) ordained the lay travelling preachers Whatcoat and Vasey (Despite Simon, *op. cit.*, 228, Vasey subsequently received Anglican ordination, but returned later to the itinerancy, and eventually ministered at City Road.) as deacons, being assisted by the Anglican priests, Dr. Coke and Creighton. Next day at the same hour he ordained Whatcoat and Vasey as elders and Dr. Coke as Superintendent. For 1st September the Diary has "ordained," but the printed Journal has "I added to them three more"; but even this is omitted in one early edition of the Journal. We gather, however, with the help of Whatcoat's Diary (Proc. VII, 9.) that what really happened was what we have stated. The three men subsequently proceeded to America with a letter, dated 10th September 1784, which contains Wesley's defence of his action and deserves careful study (Letters, VII, 238-9), as does also Coke's ordination certificate (Facsimile at Journal, VII, 16.). When they arrived in America, a Conference was held at Christmas at Baltimore, which settled the constitution of what Coke hastened to call the Methodist Episcopal Church."²³

The key to Wesley's thinking at that moment was revealed by the words in Coke's Ordination Certificate "I John Wesley think myself to be providentially called at this time to set apart."²⁴ There is also the possibility that in the use of various terms "set apart," "appoint," "ordain," he was thinking of the Greek verbs in the New Testament which are translated "ordain" and concerning himself with New Testament reality.

23. George, LQR, April, 1951, pp. 159-160; JWJ, VII, p. 15n.

24. JWJ, VII, p. 16 (opposite).

It is not necessary in this work to study the ordinations in detail. Professor George has added an excellent contribution to earlier studies.²⁵ Wesley ordained for Scotland in 1785 and for England in 1788. "There were at least twenty-seven cases altogether."²⁶

The ordination for England does raise the question of the law of the land by which the Church of England was governed and which Wesley had claimed to be the chief deterring factor but in August 1785²⁷ in his letter to Charles he seems to feel that the need for obedience had come to an end. Professor George is quite likely right that Mather's ordination, the first in England, was to provide a Superintendent. The same writer thinks that Wesley was not too clear about the issues involved within ordination.

That Wesley, deeming a presbyter to be a scriptural episcopos, should ordain laymen as elders or presbyters, is intelligible enough, but his action in ordaining Coke, already an Anglican presbyter, as Superintendent is puzzling. In the famous phrase of Whitehead: "Dr. Coke had the same right to ordain Mr. Wesley, that Mr. Wesley had to ordain Dr. Coke" (Whitehead, II, 423). The matter is best approached by asking whether Wesley meant "superintendent" to be equivalent to "Bishop." If not, what did he mean by it? If so, he should have seen the dilemma: either presbyters are Bishops,

25. Proceedings WHS, XXI, pp. 51-7; VII, pp. 8-11.

26. George, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

27. JWL, VII, p. 284.

in which case Coke needed no such ordination; or they are not--in which case, what right had he to ordain?....What was Wesley's mind? He intended to establish a Church which would be presbyterian nor contain "Bishops." We cannot doubt that his avoidance of that word was intentional. All the presbyters would have the right to ordain validly; but only some of them would be "Superintendents" and could ordain regularly. Presumably all the presbyters would be "scriptural episcopoi," but he might have argued that, though all presbyters might ordain, only Superintendents were episcopoi (See his hesitation in his Notes on the New Testament at Acts 20:17). He himself was a kind of Superintendent by no formal appointment, but in future, Superintendents would be appointed by ordination. The Church was Presbyterian in the sense that the presbyters could ordain validly; but there was no parity of ministers in Church government. This is what he presumably intended for America, and when later (as we shall see) he ordained Mather as Superintendent for England, he must have had something similar in mind.²⁸

The point is clear enough and arises out of the church position at which Wesley had arrived. He was trying to do two things, to provide continuity and to establish a right authority. His doctrine of the Church demanded that any true ministry must have an ordination which contained the divine gift and the historical continuity. It also required a kind of ministry in which authority could provide effective spirituality. He was seeking "a stage intermediate between the apostolic age and the establishment of a full diocesan

28. George, op. cit., pp. 160-161.

episcopacy"²⁹ but his reason for seeking such an ecclesiastical authority was that the church might be spiritual and effective. He believed that episcopacy and presbyterianism were ineffective in the work of saving souls and spreading Scriptural holiness. The office of Superintendent, as he planned it, would be occupied by a man with grace, gifts and judgment and when a superintendent ceased to be effective in any of these capacities he would be replaced by another who possessed these gifts in a vital manner. Offices and orders as well as men must all be subject to the necessities of the Kingdom. Wesley achieved, in large manner, what he sought.

Wesley prepared a Liturgy for the American Church. Also "A Book of Sunday Services, for optional use by English Methodists, was issued by Wesley in 1786, and again in 1788Finally, in 1787, Wesley deliberately issued the provisions of the Act of Toleration, passed in 1689, which permitted religious services by Protestant Dissenters and Quakers. He decided that all Methodist chapels and travelling preachers should be licensed under that Act, the preachers being styled simply 'Preachers of the Gospel' (Journal, VIII, 76, note)."³⁰

It is not necessary to trace events further. While,

29. Ibid., p. 161.

30. Eayrs, Wesley Christian Philosopher and Church Founder, p. 221.

the organization complete in 1749, was increasing in size and becoming efficient in operation the development was taking place in the mind of the Founder by which the transition from the Methodist Societies to the Methodist Church was made possible.

However, it is well to remind ourselves again at this point where Wesley's major emphasis lay. His primary interest was not in organization but in the spirit which made the New Testament Church a reality.

In the Sermon on Catholic Spirit he stated his final position. Having outlined the nature of Christian love he proceeds,

If thou art thus minded, may every Christian say, yea, if thou art but sincerely desirous of it, and following on till thou attain, then "thy heart is right, as my heart is with thy heart."

II. 1. "If it be, give me thy hand!" I do not mean, "Be of my opinion." You need not: I do not expect or desire it. Neither do I mean, "I will be of your opinion." I cannot: it does not depend on my choice: I can no more think, than I can see or hear, as I will. Keep your opinion; I mine; and that as steadily as ever. You need not even endeavour to come over to me, or bring me over to you. I do not desire you to dispute those points, or to hear or speak one word concerning them. Let all opinions alone on one side and the other: only "give me thine hand"....

6. Thou, O man of God, think on these things! If thou art already in this way, go on....And now run the race which is set before thee, in the royal way of universal love.... keep an even pace, rooted in the faith once delivered to the saints, and grounded in love, in true catholic love, till thou art swallowed up in love for ever and ever!

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis has been to re-examine the roots from which John Wesley's organization arose and to trace its development from the earliest Methodist Societies until Wesley's death, that is to the point at which the Methodist Societies began to emerge as the Methodist Church. The investigation was designed, first, to study in particular the relationship of Early Methodist organization to Quakerism, and second, to inquire whether Wesley had added any new elements to eighteenth century ecclesiastical organization. The following is a brief summary of conclusions.

The three points at which Quakerism could have influenced Early Methodist organization were, first, in the rise of the Religious Societies of the Church of England, second, at the time of the Wesley-Quaker associations at Bristol, and third, at the second stage of the shaping of Early Methodist organization.

First, it has not been possible to prove that Quaker influence played a part in the rise of the Religious Societies of the Church of England. It has been pointed out, however, that the period of the rise of these societies is the decade of Quakerism's maximum influence. The significance of this is too important to be over looked but it would not be right to draw any conclusion from such a fact. A quotation has been

given which indicates that, in one instance, Church of England laymen were conscious of the dynamic power of the Quaker movement and were insistent that the clergy should provide an equivalent within the Church.

Quaker influence on the Church of England is a subject for investigation. Sufficient materials are not available to draw sound conclusions in this field at the present time. The total influence of Quakerism upon English life in the three decades 1650 to 1680 also requires further study. Nothing like the proper credit has been given to the influence of Quakerism. Considerable work has been done by Quakers themselves but for this reason it has not been accorded its due. Zarek's work The Quakers makes a beginning of an impartial estimate but only a beginning.

Second, the thesis has established beyond question that Quaker influence made its mark upon Early Methodist organization in the two most formative periods of its rise, namely, 1739-41 and 1746-49. In the first of these periods Wesley was in association with the Quakers at Bristol. This was by far the most creative moment in the rise of the institutions which were the very essence of Early Methodism. Also some of the leading Early Methodists at Bristol were converts from Quakerism and brought their heritage into the Wesleyan movement. The thesis has attempted to interpret how that influence

affected Wesley and found expression in the organization. In particular it revealed to Wesley the possibility of an expansive principle of organization which through the use of a lay ministry would provide a simple connexionalism as the instrument for the nurture and extension of the Societies. No attempt has been made to say that Wesley transferred these organizational elements in a mechanical manner to Early Methodism. Wesley's genius for organization and the group-wisdom of the Societies were the medium through which this inspiration produced its effect upon Methodist organization. There remains the possibility of debate as to the amount of Quaker influence and its possible effect but there is no longer any question as to the fact that Quakerism influenced Early Methodism organization in this period.

Third, Quaker influence is more clearly marked in the second period in what has been called the intermediate structure of the organization. John Bennett introduced the quarterly meeting into Methodism and in so doing carried over one of the characteristic features of Quaker organization. The intermediate structure arose from the introduction of the quarterly meeting because it provided the centre around which the circuit system developed.

When Quaker influence is recognized in these two periods, and the possibility of similar influence exists at the time of the rise of the Religious Societies of the Church of England,

the conclusion is that Quaker influence upon Early Methodist organization, even when all allowances have been made, was considerable.

The second question to which an answer has been sought is whether Wesley added any new elements to eighteenth-century ecclesiastical organization. The origin and development of the Methodist Connexional system was Wesley's most distinctive contribution to ecclesiastical polity. A simple type of connexionalism was already in existence. The ecclesiastical type of Connexionalism which Wesley developed, by which he governed his Societies and which became the structure of English Methodism was an original contribution.

However, in this connection it is proper to point out that what Wesley was seeking was a new kind of authority. He created the office of Superintendent. This was not a new thing in church polity although he worked it out in practical church usage in a new manner. What he endeavoured to create was an authority with less power than an Anglican bishop and more direction than a Presbyterian presbytery but which would be spiritual, flexible, transferable and which would keep constantly before it the tasks of "vital, practical religion." English Methodism has made an attempt to perpetuate Wesley's objective in both form and spirit.

Wesley's most distinctive contribution was one which transcended the realm of organization nevertheless apart from

which the rise of Early Methodist organization cannot be understood. For Wesley was the ambassador of "an idea whose time had come." England was ready for leadership in moral and spiritual living. Wesley's greatest contribution was that he lifted the quality of religion to a new level. He created a new spiritual community. He insisted upon faith instead of intellectual assent, religious experience rather than ecclesiastical forms. He trained and sent forth a Christian ministry of New Testament character and the power of godliness. He challenged the existing church by demonstrating the real character of her mission. All Western Christendom has been influenced so profoundly by this elevation in moral and spiritual concepts that it is difficult now to appreciate the difference that Wesley made. His contribution to organization has to be viewed in this perspective.

Finally, Wesley made still another contribution which must be pointed out. Wesley provided a turning point in the history of Western Christianity. From the Reformation until Wesley Christendom had been suffering a fragmentizing process in which each element claimed Scriptural authority for its particular type of polity. When Wesley declared that "neither Christ or His Apostles prescribed any particular form of Church government" he arrested this process. After some time in which this truth was absorbed those denominations which had claimed Scriptural authority for their polity began to

realize that there was no ground for their separate identity and the present ecumenical movement began to take shape. Evidence to this is provided by the fact that Methodists have always been in the forefront of this movement for the restoration of the divided body of Christ.

APPENDIX I

APPENDIX I

THE RULES

1. In the latter end of the year 1739, eight or ten persons came to me in London, who appeared to be deeply convinced of sin, and earnestly groaning for redemption. They desired (as did two or three more the next day) that I would spend some time with them in prayer, and advise them how to flee from the wrath to come; which they saw continually hanging over their heads. That we might have more time for this great work, I appointed a day when they might all come together, which from thenceforward they did every week, namely, on Thursday, in the evening. To these, and as many more as desired to join with them, (for their number increased daily,) I gave those advices, from time to time, which I judged most needful for them; and we always concluded our meeting with prayer suited to their several necessities.

2. This was the rise of the United Society, first in London, and then in other places. Such a society is no other than "a company of men having the form and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation."

3. That it may the more easily be discerned, whether

they are indeed working out their own salvation, each society is divided into smaller companies, called classes, according to their respective places of abode. There are about twelve persons in every class; one of whom is styled the Leader. It is his business, (1.) To see each person in his class once a week at least, in order to inquire how their souls prosper; to advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort, as occasion may require; to receive what they are willing to give toward the relief of the poor. (2.) To meet the Minister and the Stewards of the society once a week; in order to inform the Minister of any that are sick, or of any that walk disorderly, and will not be reproved; to pay to the Stewards what they have received of their several classes in the week preceding; and to show their account of what each person has contributed.

4. There is one only condition previously required in those who desire admission into these societies,--a desire "to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins:" But, wherever this is really fixed in the soul, it will be shown by its fruits. It is therefore expected of all who continue therein, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

First, by doing no harm, by avoiding evil in every kind; especially that which is most generally practised: Such is, the taking the name of God in vain; the profaning the day of the Lord, either by doing ordinary work thereon, or by buying

or selling; drunkenness, buying or selling spirituous liquors, or drinking them, unless in cases of extreme necessity; fighting, quarreling, brawling; brother going to law with brother; returning evil for evil, or railing for railing; the using many words in buying or selling; the buying or selling uncustomed goods; the giving or taking things on usury, that is, unlawful interest; uncharitable or unprofitable conversation, particularly speaking evil of Magistrates or of Ministers; doing to others as we would not they should do unto us; doing what we know is not for the glory of God, as the "putting on of gold or costly apparel;" the taking such diversions as cannot be used in the name of the Lord Jesus; the singing those songs, or reading those books, which do not tend to the knowledge or love of God; softness, and needless self-indulgence; laying up treasures upon earth; borrowing without a probability of paying; or taking up goods without a probability of paying for them.

5. It is expected of all who continue in these societies, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

Secondly, by doing good, by being, in every kind, merciful after their power; as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and as far as is possible, to all men;--to their bodies, of the ability which God giveth, by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting

or helping them that are sick, or in prison;--to their souls, by instructing, reproofing or exhorting all they have any intercourse with; trampling under foot that enthusiastic doctrine of devils, that "we are not to do good unless our heart be free to it;" By doing good especially to them that are of the household of faith, or groaning so to be; employing them preferably to others, buying one of another; helping each other in business; and so much the more, because the world will love its own, and them only: By all possible diligence and frugality, that the gospel be not blamed: By running with patience the race that is set before them, "denying themselves, and taking up their cross daily;" submitting to bear the reproach of Christ, to be as the filth and off-scouring of the world; and looking that men should "say all manner of evil of them falsely for the Lord's sake."

6. It is expected of all who desire to continue in these societies, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

Thirdly, by attending upon all the ordinances of God. Such are, the public worship of God; the ministry of the word, either read or expounded; the supper of the Lord; family and private prayer; searching the Scriptures; and fasting, or abstinence.

7. These are the General Rules of our societies; all which we are taught of God to observe, even in his written

word, the only rule, and the sufficient rule, both of our faith and practice. And all these, we know, his Spirit writes on every truly awakened heart. If there be any among us who observe them not, who habitually break any of them, let it be made known unto them who watch over that soul as they that must give an account. We will admonish him of the error of his ways; we will bear with him for a season: But then if he repent not, he hath no more place among us. We have delivered our own souls.

JOHN WESLEY,
CHARLES WESLEY.

May 1, 1743.

APPENDIX II

APPENDIX II

APPENDIX II
OF CLASS MEETINGS--SPECIMEN

Nightingale (1807) who had been a Methodist preacher gives the following account of the rise of the classes, the rules for a leader and a specimen of a class meeting. While obviously he is not sympathetic the document has historical value.

Dear Madam,

In this letter, I purpose giving you some information concerning the origin and nature of what are called Class-meetings.

This is such a very important part of the economy of Methodism, that I must give you a circumstantial account of its origin, which I will do in Mr. Wesley's own words.

"As much," says he, "as we endeavoured to watch over each other, we soon found that some did not live the gospel. I do not know that any hypocrites were crept in; for indeed there was no temptation. But several grew cold, and gave way to the sins which had long easily beset them. We quickly perceived there were many ill consequences of suffering these to remain among us. It was dangerous to others; inasmuch as all sin is of an infectious nature. It brought such a scandal on their brethren, as exposed them to what was not properly the reproach of Christ. It laid a stumbling-block in the way of others, and caused the truth to be evil spoken of.

"We groaned under these inconveniences long, before a remedy could be found. At length, while we were thinking of quite another thing, we struck upon a method, for which we have cause to bless God ever since. I was talking with several of the society in Bristol, concerning the means of paying the debts there, (which had been incurred by building, etc.) when one stood up and said, 'Let every member of the society give a penny a week till all are paid.' Another answered, 'But many of them are poor, and cannot afford to do it.'--'Then,' said he, 'put eleven of the poorest with me, and if they can

give anything, well. I will call on them weekly, and if they can give nothing, I will give for them as well as for myself. And each of you call on eleven of your neighbours weekly: receive what they give and make up what is wanting.' It was done. In a while some of these informed me, 'they found such and such a one did not live as he ought.' It struck me immediately, 'This is the thing; the very thing we have wanted so long.' I called together all the leaders of the classes, (so we used to term them and their companies) and desired, that each would make a particular inquiry into the behaviour of those whom he saw weekly: they did so. Many disorderly walkers were detected. Some turned from the evil of their ways. Some were put away from us. Many saw it with fear, and rejoiced unto God with reverence.

"As soon as possible the same method was used in London and all other places. Evil men were detected and reprov'd. They were borne with for a season. If they forsook their sins, we received them gladly: if they obstinately persisted therein, it was openly declared, that they were not of us. The rest mourned and prayed for them, and yet rejoiced, that, as far as in us lay, the scandal was rolled away from the society.

"It is the business of a leader,

"1. To see each person in his class, once a week at the least: in order

"To inquire how their souls prosper;

"To advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort, as occasion may require;

"To receive what they are willing to give, towards the relief of the poor.

"2. To meet the minister and the stewards of the society, in order

"To inform the minister of any that are sick, or any that are disorderly, and will not be reprov'd;

"To pay to the stewards what they have received of their several classes in the week preceding.

"At first they visited each person at his own house: but this was soon found not so expedient. And that on many accounts. 1. It took up more time than most of the leaders had to spare. 2. Many persons lived with masters, mistresses, or relations, who would not suffer them to be visited. 3. At the houses of those who are not so averse, they often had no

opportunity of speaking to them but in company. And this did not at all answer the end proposed of exhorting, comforting, or reproof. 4. It frequently happened that one affirmed what another denied. And this could not be cleared, without seeing them together. 5. Little misunderstandings and quarrels of various kinds, frequently arose among relations or neighbours; effectually to remove which, it was needful to see them all face to face. Upon all these considerations, it was agreed, that those of each class should meet all together. And by this means, a more full inquiry was made into the behaviour of every person. Those who could not be visited at home, or no otherwise than in company, had the same advantage with others. Advice or reproof was given as need required; quarrels made up, misunderstandings removed. And after an hour or two spent in this labour of love, they concluded with prayer and thanksgiving."

This, Madam, is Mr. Wesley's account of the origin of class-meetings at Bristol; which branch of Methodism being attended with the most beneficial effects, though instituted at first only to answer a temporary purpose, soon became common throughout the whole connexion; and is at this time the chief support of the methodistical hierarchy. I will, therefore, be still more minute in detailing to you the nature and objects of class-meeting.

A class-meeting, at present, consists of an indefinite number of persons, generally from twelve to twenty; though sometimes fewer even than twelve. This meeting is designed for the spiritual advantage of members only, or of those that are desirous of becoming such. It is composed either of persons of both sexes, of men only, or of the fair sex. In the two first cases, the leader is always a brother; in the last case, the leader is chosen out of the sisterhood. These meetings are generally holden at private houses, and commence at eight in the evening. The leader having opened the service by singing and prayer, all the members sit down, and he then relates to them his own experience during the preceding week. His joys, and his sorrows; his hopes and his fears; his conflicts with the world, the flesh, and the devil; his fightings without and his fears within; his dread of hell, or his hope of heaven; his pious longings and secret prayers for the prosperity of the church at large, and for those his brothers and sisters in class in particular. This experience is generally concluded with some such language as the following:-- "After all, my dear brethren, I still find a determination in my own soul to press forward for the mark of the prize of my high calling of God in Christ Jesus. He is still precious.

His word is an ointment poured forth. After all my shortcomings--my doubts, and anxieties--my wanderings, weakness, and weariness, his spirit still whispers to my heart--'Thou art black but comely. Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it. Make haste, my beloved, and be thou like to a roe, or to a young hart, upon the mountains of spices!' so I still may say to my sweet Jesus--

'I hold thee with a trembling hand,
And will not let thee go.'

After some such harangue as this, the leader proceeds to inquire into the state of every soul present; saying, "Well sister, or well brother, how do you find the state of your soul this evening?" The member then proceeds, without rising, to unbosom his or her mind to the leader; not, as has often been said, by particular confession, but by a general recapitulation of what has passed in the mind during the week. Such advice, correction, reproof, and consolation, is then given as the state of the case may require; so the leader passes on to the next, and the next, until every one has received a portion of meat in due season.

After this, the leader, or some other on whom he may be pleased to call, gives out a stanza or two of a hymn, which being sung standing, they proceed with prayer; when such thanksgivings, deprecations, or petitions, are poured forth as the different experiences may have suggested.

Any one is at liberty to exercise the gift of prayer, and no strangers being present, a freer vent is given to the effusions of the mind and the soft meltings of the soul, than is usual at a public prayer-meeting. Those who are still unconverted, or who labour in the pangs of the new birth, lay their unhappy case before God; and in the most pressing manner, beseech the merciful Jehovah then to pity them--at last to lend a willing ear to their complaints--to bow the heavens of his love and come down--to open the bowels of divine compassion towards them--to look upon the bleeding wounds of his suffering Son; and to pardon all their sins upon the consideration of his merits.

Those who are groaning for full redemption--who seek to have their robes washed and made white in the blood of the Lamb--who will not be comforted until the last remains of sin are removed from their hearts, and God declares that they "are all fair, and that there is no spot in them" are more than commonly solicitous that the Holy Ghost would come and

dwell in their souls without a rival; and that the enemies they had seen that day they should see no more for ever.

For the careless, the formal, and the lukewarm, the most earnest prayers are put up, lest the Almighty, in disgust, should "spue them out of his mouth." In short, Madam, every case is fully canvassed, and the great Physician of souls is applied to for

A sovereign balm for every wound--
 a salve for every sore.

As singing forms a considerable portion of the service at a class meeting, I must give you one or two specimens of their hymns.

APPENDIX III

APPENDIX III

THE AMERICAN LETTER

Bristol, September 10, 1784.

1. By a very uncommon train of providences many of the Provinces of North America are totally disjoined from their Mother Country and erected into independent States. The English Government has no authority over them, either civil or ecclesiastical, any more than over the States of Holland. A civil authority is exercised over them, partly by the Congress, partly by the Provincial Assemblies. But no one either exercises or claims any ecclesiastical authority at all. In this peculiar situation some thousands of the inhabitants of these States desire my advice; and in compliance with their desire I have drawn up a little sketch.

2. Lord King's Account of the Primitive Church convinced me many years ago that bishops and presbyters are the same order, and consequently have the same right to ordain. For many years I have been importuned from time to time to exercise this right by ordaining part of our travelling preachers. But I have still refused, not only for peace' sake, but because I was determined as little as possible to violate the established order of the National Church to which I belonged.

3. But the case is widely different between England and North America. Here there are bishops who have a legal

jurisdiction: in America there are none, neither any parish ministers. So that for some hundred miles together there is none either to baptize or to administer the Lord's supper. Here, therefore, my scruples are at an end; and I conceive myself at full liberty, as I violate no order and invade no man's right by appointing and sending labourers into the harvest.

4. I have accordingly appointed Dr. Coke and Mr. Francis Asbury to be Joint Superintendents over our brethren in North America; as also Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey to act as elders among them, by baptizing and administering the Lord's Supper. And I have prepared a Liturgy little differing from that of the Church of England (I think, the best constituted National Church in the world), which I advise all the traveling preachers to use on the Lord's Day in all the congregations, reading the Litany only on Wednesdays and Fridays and praying extempore on all other days. I also advise the elders to administer the Supper of the Lord on every Lord's Day.

5. If any one will point out a more rational and scriptural way of feeding and guiding those poor sheep in the wilderness, I will gladly embrace it. At present I cannot see any better method than that I have taken.

6. It has, indeed, been proposed to desire the English bishops to ordain part of our preachers for America. But to

this I object; (1) I desired the Bishop of London to ordain only one, but could not prevail. (2) If they consented, we know the slowness of their proceedings; but the matter admits of no delay. (3) If they would ordain them now, they would likewise expect to govern them. And how grievously would this entangle us! (4) As our American brethren are now totally disentangled both from the State and from the English hierarchy, we dare not entangle them again either with the one or the other. They are now at full liberty simply to follow the Scriptures and the Primitive Church. And we judge it best that they should stand fast in that liberty wherewith God has so strangely made them free.

APPENDIX IV THE DEED OF DECLARATION

TO ALL TO WHOM THESE PRESENTS SHALL COME, JOHN WESLEY,
late of Lincoln College, Oxford, but now of the City Road,
London, Clerk, sends greeting:

SINCE diverse buildings, commonly called chapels, with
a manse and dwelling-house, or other appurtenances to each
of the same belonging, situate in various parts of Great
Britain, have been given and conveyed from time to time by
the said John Wesley to certain persons and their heirs in
each of the said gifts and conveyances made, which are re-
corded in His Majesty's High Court of Chancery, upon the

APPENDIX IV

acknowledgment of the said John Wesley pursuant to the act
of Parliament in that behalf made and provided: Upon trust that
the Trustees in the said several Deeds respectively named,
and the survivors of them, and their heirs and assigns, and
the Trustees for the time being to be elected as in the said
Deeds is appointed, should permit and suffer the said John
Wesley, and such other person and persons as he should for
that purpose from time to time nominate and appoint at all
times during his life or his will and pleasure, to have and
enjoy the free use and benefit of the said premises, that be
the said John Wesley, and such person and persons as he should
nominate and appoint, might therein peaceably and lawfully

APPENDIX IV

THE DEED OF DECLARATION

TO ALL TO WHOM THESE PRESENTS SHALL COME, JOHN WESLEY, late of Lincoln College, Oxford, but now of the City Road, London, Clerk, sendeth greeting:

WHEREAS divers buildings, commonly called chapels, with a messuage and dwelling-house, or other appurtenances to each of the same belonging, situate in various parts of Great Britain, have been given and conveyed from time to time by the said John Wesley to certain persons and their heirs in each of the said gifts and conveyances named, which are inrolled in His Majesty's High Court of Chancery, upon the acknowledgement of the said John Wesley pursuant to the Act of Parliament in that case made and provided; Upon trust that the Trustees in the said several Deeds respectively named, and the survivors of them, and their heirs and assigns, and the Trustees for the time being to be elected as in the said Deeds is appointed, should permit and suffer the said John Wesley, and such other person and persons as he should for that purpose from time to time nominate and appoint at all times during his life at his will and pleasure, to have and enjoy the free use and benefit of the said premises, that he the said John Wesley, and such person and persons as he should nominate and appoint, might therein preach and expound God's

Holy Word; And upon further trust that the said respective Trustees, and the survivors of them, and their heirs and assigns, and the Trustees for the time being, should permit and suffer Charles Wesley, brother of the said John Wesley, and such other person and persons as the said Charles Wesley should for that purpose from time to time nominate and appoint, in like manner during his life; To have, use, and enjoy the said premises respectively for the like purposes as aforesaid, and after the decease of the survivor of them the said John Wesley and Charles Wesley, then upon further trust that the said respective Trustees, and the survivors of them, and their heirs and assigns, and the Trustees for the time being for ever, should permit and suffer such person and persons, and for such time and times, as should be appointed at the yearly Conference of the people called Methodists in London, Bristol, or Leeds, and no others, to have and enjoy the said premises for the purposes aforesaid: AND WHEREAS divers persons have in like manner given or conveyed many chapels, with messuages and dwelling-houses or other appurtenances to the same belonging, situate in various parts of Great Britain, and also in Ireland, to certain Trustees in each of the said gifts and conveyances respectively named: Upon the like trusts, and for the same uses and purposes as aforesaid (except only that in some of the said gifts and conveyances no life-estate or other interest is therein or thereby given and reserved to

the said Charles Wesley); AND WHEREAS, for rendering effectual the trusts created by the said several gifts or conveyances, and that no doubt or litigation may arise with respect unto the same or the interpretation and true meaning thereof, it has been thought expedient by the said John Wesley, on behalf of himself as donor of the several chapels, with the messuages, dwelling-houses, or appurtenances before-mentioned, as of the donors of the said other chapels, with the messuages, dwelling-houses, or appurtenances to the same belonging, given or conveyed to the like uses and trusts, to explain the words "Yearly Conference of the people called Methodists" contained in all the said Trust Deeds, and to declare what persons are members of the said Conference, and how the succession and identity thereof is to be continued:

NOW THEREFORE THESE PRESENTS WITNESS that, for accomplishing the aforesaid purposes the said John Wesley doth hereby declare that the Conference of the people called Methodists in London, Bristol, or Leeds, ever since there hath been any yearly Conference of the said people called Methodists in any of the said places, hath always heretofore consisted of the Preachers and Expounders of God's Holy Word, commonly called Methodist Preachers, in connexion with and under the care of the said John Wesley, whom he hath thought expedient year after year to summons to meet him in one or other of the said places of London, Bristol, or Leeds, to advise with them for

the promotion of the Gospell of Christ, to appoint the said persons so summoned, and the other Preachers and Expounders of God's Holy Word, also in connexion with and under the care of the said John Wesley, not summoned to the said yearly Conference, to the use and enjoyment of the said chapels and premises so given and conveyed. Upon trust for the said John Wesley, and such other person and persons as he should appoint during his life as aforesaid, and for the expulsion of unworthy and admission of new persons under his care and into his Connexion to be Preachers and Expounders as aforesaid, and also of other persons upon trial for the like purposes, the names of all which persons so summoned by the said John Wesley, the persons appointed, with the chapels and premises to which they were so appointed, together with the duration of such appointments, and of those expelled or admitted into connexion or upon trial, with all other matters transacted and done at the said yearly Conference, have, year by year, been printed and published under the title of "Minutes of Conference";

AND THESE PRESENTS FURTHER WITNESS, and the said John Wesley doth hereby avouch and further declare, that the several persons hereinafter named,....(the names of the one hundred preachers follow)....being Preachers and Expounders of God's Holy Word, under the care and in connexion with the said John Wesley, have been and now are and do on the day of the date

hereof constitute the members of the said Conference according to the true intent and meaning of the said several gifts and conveyances wherein the words "Conference of the people called Methodists" are mentioned and contained; and that the said several persons before-named and their successors for ever, to be chosen as hereafter mentioned, are and shall for ever be construed, taken, and be, The Conference of the People called Methodists. Nevertheless, upon the terms and subject to the regulations hereinafter prescribed, that is to say:

1st, That the members of the said Conference, and their successors for the time being for ever, shall assemble once in every year at London, Bristol, or Leeds (except as after-mentioned) for the purposes aforesaid, and the time and place of holding every subsequent Conference shall be appointed at the preceeding one, save that the next Conference after the date hereof shall be holden at Leeds, in Yorkshire, the last Tuesday in July next.

2d, The act of the majority in number of the Conference assembled as aforesaid, shall be had, taken, and be the act of the whole Conference, to all intents, purposes, and constructions whatsoever.

3d, That after the Conference shall be assembled as aforesaid, they shall first proceed to fill up all the vacancies occasioned by death or absence as after mentioned.

4th, No act of the Conference assembled as aforesaid

shall be had, taken, or be the act of the Conference until forty of the members thereof are assembled, unless reduced under that number by death since the prior Conference or absence as after mentioned, nor until all the vacancies occasioned by death or absence shall be filled up by the election of new members of the Conference so as to make up the number one hundred, unless there be not a sufficient number of persons objects of such election; and during the assembly of the Conference there shall always be forty members present at the doing of any act, save as aforesaid, or otherwise such act shall be void.

5th, The duration of the yearly assembly of the Conference shall not be less than five days, nor more than three weeks, and be concluded by the appointment of the Conference if under twenty-one days, or otherwise the conclusion thereof shall follow of course at the end of the said twenty-one days, the whole of all which said time of the assembly of the Conference shall be had, taken, considered, and be the yearly Conference of the people called Methodists, and all acts of the Conference during such yearly assembly thereof shall be the acts of the Conference, and none others.

6th, Immediately after all the vacancies occasioned by death or absence are filled up by the election of new members as aforesaid, the Conference shall chuse a President and Secretary of their assembly out of themselves, who shall

continue such until the election of another President or Secretary in the next or other subsequent Conference, and the said President shall have the privilege and power of two members in all acts of the Conference during his presidency, and such other powers, privileges, and authorities as the Conference shall from time to time see fit to entrust into his hands.

7th, Any member of the Conference absenting himself from the yearly assembly thereof for two years successively, without the consent or dispensation of the Conference, and be not present on the first day of the third yearly assembly thereof, at the time and place appointed for the holding of the same, shall cease to be a member of the Conference from and after the said first day of the said third yearly assembly thereof to all intents and purposes as though he were naturally dead; but the Conference shall and may dispense with or consent to the absence of any member from any of the said yearly assemblies for any cause which the Conference may see fit or necessary, and such member whose absence shall be so dispensed with or consented to by the Conference shall not by such absence cease to be a member thereof.

8th, The Conference shall and may expel and put out from being a member thereof, or from being in connexion therewith, or from being upon trial, any person member of the Conference or admitted into connexion, or upon trial, for any cause

which to the Conference may seem fit or necessary; and every member of the Conference so expelled and put out shall cease to be a member thereof to all intents and purposes as though he were naturally dead. And the Conference, immediately after the expulsion of any member thereof as aforesaid, shall elect another person to be a member of the Conference in the stead of such member so expelled.

9th, The Conference shall and may admit into connexion with them, or upon trial, any person or persons whom they shall approve to be Preachers and Expounders of God's Holy Word, under the care and direction of the Conference, the name of every such person or persons so admitted into connexion or upon trial as aforesaid, with the time and degrees of the admission, being entered in the Journals or Minutes of the Conference.

10th, No person shall be elected a member of the Conference who hath not been admitted into connexion with the Conference as a Preacher and Expounder of God's Holy Word as aforesaid for twelve months.

11th, The Conference shall not nor may nominate or appoint any person to the use and enjoyment of or to preach and expound God's Holy Word in any of the chappels and premises so given or conveyed, or which may be given or conveyed upon the trusts aforesaid, who is not either a member of the Conference or admitted into connexion with the same,

or upon trial as aforesaid; nor appoint any person for more than three years successively to the use and enjoyment of any chappel and premises already given or to be given or conveyed upon the trusts aforesaid, except ordained Ministers of the Church of England.

12th, That the Conference shall and may appoint the place of holding the yearly assembly thereof at any other city, town, or place than London, Bristol, or Leeds, when it shall seem expedient so to do.

13th, And for the convenience of the chappels and premises already or which may hereafter be given or conveyed upon the trusts aforesaid, situate in Ireland or other parts out of the kingdom of Great Britain, the Conference shall and may, when and as often as it shall seem expedient, but not otherwise, appoint and delegate any member or members of the Conference, with all or any of the powers, priviledges, and advantages hereinbefore contained or vested in the Conference; and all and every the acts, admissions, expulsions, and appointments whatsoever of such member or members of the Conference so appointed and delegated as aforesaid, the same being put into writing and signed by such delegate or delegates, and entered in the Journals or Minutes of the Conference, and subscribed as after mentioned, shall be deemed, taken, and be the acts, admissions, expulsions, and appointments of the Conference to all intents, constructions, and purposes

whatsoever, from the respective times when the same shall be done by such delegate or delegates, notwithstanding anything herein contained to the contrary.

14th, All resolutions and orders touching elections, admissions, expulsions, consents, dispensations, delegations, or appointments and acts whatsoever of the Conference shall be entered and written in the Journals or Minutes of the Conference, which shall be kept for that purpose, publicly read, and then subscribed by the President and Secretary thereof for the time being during the time such Conference shall be assembled, and when so entered and subscribed shall be had, taken, received, and be the acts of the Conference; and such entry and subscription as aforesaid shall be had, taken, received, and be evidence of all and every such acts of the said Conference and of their said delegates without the aid of any other proof, and whatever shall not be so entered and subscribed as aforesaid shall not be had, taken, received, or be the act of the Conference. And the said President and Secretary are hereby required and obliged to enter and subscribe as aforesaid every act whatever of the Conference.

Lastly, Whenever the said Conference shall be reduced under the number of forty members, and continue so reduced for three yearly assemblies thereof successively, or whenever the members thereof shall decline or neglect to meet together annually for the purposes aforesaid during the space of three

years, that then and in either of the said events the Conference of the people called Methodists shall be extinguished, and all the aforesaid powers, privileges, and advantages shall cease, and the said chappels and premises, and all other chapels and premises, which now are or hereafter may be settled, given, or conveyed upon the trusts aforesaid, shall vest in the Trustees for the time being of the said chappels and premises respectively, and their successors for ever; Upon trust that they and the survivors of them, and the Trustees for the time being, do, shall, and may appoint such person and persons to preach and expound God's Holy Word therein, and to have the use and enjoyment thereof, for such time and in such manner as to them shall seem proper.

PROVIDED ALWAYS, that nothing herein contained shall extend or be construed to extend, to extinguish, lessen, or abridge the life-estate of the said John Wesley and Charles Wesley, or either of them, of and in any of the said chappels and premises, or any other chapels and premises, wherein they the said John Wesley and Charles Wesley, or either of them, now have or may have any estate or interest, power or authority whatsoever.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the said John Wesley hath hereunto set his hand and seal, the twenty-eighth day of February, in the twenty-fourth year of the reign of our Sovereign Lord George the Third, by the grace of God of Great Britain, France,

and Ireland, King, Defender of the Faith, and so forth, and
in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty-
four.

JOHN WESLEY.

Sealed and delivered, being first duly stamp'd)
in the presence of)
WM. CLULOW, Quality Court, Chancery Lane, London.
RICHD. YOUNG, Clerk to the said Wm. Clulow.

Taken and acknowledged by the Revd. John Wesley, party hereto,
this twenty-eighth of February, 1784, at the Public Office,
before me,

EDWD. MONTAGU.

ENDORSEMENT

Dated Febry. 28th, 1784.

CLULOW.

The Rev. John Wesley's Declaration & Appointment of the
Conference of the people called Methodists, inrolled in His
Majty's High Court of Chancery, the ninth day of March, in
the year of our Lord 1784, being first duly stampt according
to the tenor of the Statutes made for that purpose.

THO. BRIGSTOCK.

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